

# THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1593.—VOL. LXII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 11, 1893.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



MR. VIDAL WAS LEANING OVER THE FENCE, HOLDING PEGGY'S HAND IN HIS.

## THE FATE OF PEGGY.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

PEGGY was shelling green peas, or rather professing to do so; to tell the truth she was in her idliest mood, for the morning was hot and drowsy. There was not a cloud upon the deep blue sky, not the faintest breath of air stirred the leaves above our heads, even the birds had succumbed to the intense heat and were silent in their nests.

"Oh dear," sighed my sister for the fiftieth time, "how sultry it is;" and she lifted her youthful face skywards as though looking for some indication of the rain we so much needed. "I wish you would not be so dreadfully industrious, Phoebe; the mere sight of your energy discomforts me."

"My work must be done; and I am thinking, Peggy, if you do not make more haste, dad will have no peas for dinner—"

She worked steadily for a little while, and then fell again into idleness, whilst I paused a moment to watch her.

She was very lovely, this little sister of mine; there was the dewy softness of a child in the large, liquid brown eyes, the happiness of youth upon the broad, low brow, the gentle spirited mouth.

She had pushed back her lilac sun bonnet, and curling masses of darkest chestnut hair crowned the pretty head, and clustered about the slender white throat.

She always reminded me of a moss rosebud, she was so sweet, so dainty to look upon, and the softest of roses were in her rounded, dimpled cheeks. Becoming conscious of my regard, she said—

"Well, Mother Hubbard, of what are you thinking, that you looked so grave! The old owl in the copse is not half so solemn—"

"I was thinking how pretty you are," I answered slowly. She laughed and blushed, then asked seriously,—

"Am I really very pretty, or do you only think so? I wonder if you and Randal see me with

different eyes, just because you are both so fond of me!"

I answered her with another question—

"Do you ever stay to think how fond Randal is of you, Peggy?"

"Why, no; how can one measure affection! But he is a dear good boy; I could not love him better if he were my brother—and speaking of him seems to have called him to us, for here he comes across the paddock. Now I shall enjoy the rest I have well earned."

Randal Hirst soon joined us, his quick strides bringing him to Peggy's side in an incredibly short time.

He was a tall, stalwart, sunburnt young fellow with a good-natured face, and honest grey eyes, that had a trick of softening as they rested on my sister. He had lived with us at Hazell Dell Farm for five years, being first my father's pupil and now his most valued assistant.

"Oh," said Peggy, resting her chin in her hollowed palm, "I hope you have come to stop; I am quite fatigued with my exertions, and the heat. If you know anything of charity you will lend me your aid."

With a laugh he sat down beside her, and



began to shell peas in the clumsiest fashion, for his hands were big and unused to such a task; all the while Peggy laughed unmercifully at his awkwardness, and instead of thanking, mocked him.

"You are incorrigible," he said at last, darting a threatening look at her. "I don't know what punishment will meet your offence. I think I will leave you to your labours—"

"No, oh no! How cowardly to put your hand to the plough and then look back; and I'm not poking fun at you; I am only carried away by the natural exuberance of my spirits, and—the delight of having you near," with an arch, bewildering glance.

"Do you mean that," he asked so eagerly that she first looked at him in astonishment, and then said carelessly—

"Of course I do; you are ever so much better fun than dear old Phoebe; and when you are good you fetch and carry so prettily—really you are a very useful member of the household. By the way have you no news for us?"

"I was coming to that; but you are such a magpie that no one else gets a chance to hear his own voice. I retract! I retract!" as Peggy pretended to strike him. "If you are merciless I will keep my news."

"Oh, don't be greedy; I am dying for a little excitement, and I am curious."

"That is an hereditary vice. Well, the fact is, the new man has arrived."

"What is he like, Randal? Don't keep us on the tenter hooks of suspense. Is he young, handsome, debonnaire; or old, decrepid, uninteresting?"

"He is neither very young nor very old," began Randal, in a provokingly slow manner. "I can't say if he is handsome, for I never cared to look enough to know, I shouldn't call him debonnaire, but a stiff, high and mighty person, whose valuation of himself is far in excess of that of others."

"Humph!" said Peggy with a pout, "let us agree to dislike him. But isn't it a pity he is not nice? because he is rich, unmarried, and so would be an eligible *parti*. Why are you frowning, Randal, and where did you see Mr. Rodney Vidal?"

"In the south meadow; he seems an energetic beggar, for despite his long journey of yesterday he was out at five this morning, and looking over the estate, suggesting changes here and alterations there to his steward. He saw me as I was crossing the meadow, and called to me, was Mr. Loftus? I said no, only his assistant; then he wanted to know if the south meadow was for sale, if so, he wished to buy, as it really seemed to have belonged originally to the Hazelwood estate. The upshot of it all is, that he is coming to see the governor at noon, to try to effect a purchase."

"Then he will have his journey as the sole reward of his efforts," said Peggy promptly; "I hate such covetousness; it is a modern version of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard. Why the South Meadow is the prettiest spot in the county, and dad would never sell."

"That remains to be proved; money is rather tight just now, and Vidal is prepared to give what Mr. Loftus demands."

"Of course; just because that little spot of ground is not his own, its value has gone up in his opinion; if he possessed it, he would despise it. Thank you Randal, you have done very nicely, and not spilt more than half the peas. I can dispense with your services now, but please remember we dine at one," and with a saucy nod she disappeared through the porch. Randal's eyes followed her wistfully.

"Does she guess, do you think Phoebe?" he asked shamefacedly.

"I am sure she does not; she is only a child at heart, barely eighteen, and you never venture to speak out; if you would win you must woo."

"But if I should not win."

"It is bad policy to meet trouble half-way," and gathering up my pile of work I too left him, knowing my presence was needed in the kitchen. We were a primitive people, breakfasting at seven, dining at one, whilst we combined tea and supper when dad and Randal had finished their day's work. For generations a Loftus had held the

Hazel Dell Farm, and despite successive bad seasons, and family misfortunes, each Peregrine Loftus had contrived to leave the old homestead to another Peregrine, so that the line of succession had remained unbroken. Only to my father no son was born, and, much as he loved us, I felt that there were times when he bitterly regretted our sex, for he being gone, who shall perpetuate his honourable name. The Hall had passed out of its owner's hands, but we still inhabited the farm and the villagers regarded us with deeper respect than they were ever likely to show Mr. Rodney Vidal, despite his high birth and great wealth; in fact, with our poorer neighbours it was almost the rooted belief that Hazelden must have an end, when no Loftus ruled at the Farm. We were not rich, but we had enough for our wants, and a little to spare for those of others, and we never pretended to be greater or grander than we were; in fact I think neither Peggy nor I would have changed lots with the best born girl in the county, so proud were we of our name.

We had just dined; Peggy had taken a basket and scissors being intent upon robbing the flower-beds, and I was tying on my garden hat in the porch, when a step sounded upon the path, and a low, refined, but withal haughty, voice enquired for my father. Peggy veered quickly round, gave one curious half vexed look at the stranger, then moved away leaving me to reply to his questions. I had no doubt that he was Rodney Vidal because strangers were few indeed at Hazelden. I replied that my father would see him and bade him follow me into our best room which we still called by the old fashioned comfortable word parlour. He did not offer his card, but merely saying "I presume you know me," followed my lead.

"Certainly," I answered without turning my head, for his haughty manner repelled me; "You are Mr. Vidal the new owner of the Hall." Ushering him into the parlour, I went in search of my father, whispering to him, "Don't part with the meadow, daddy, it will seem an omen of ill if you do; let us keep our little possessions intact."

"My dear," he answered stoutly, "you need have no fear; not even if the pretty Princess of Wales asked for it, should she have it, and that is saying a great deal."

Now father was a resolute man, and his words set my mind at rest, so that I danced my way back to Peggy, for though I was my father's housekeeper, and a person in authority, I was only twenty-two, and had still some mischief left in me. Peggy was sitting in a low chair when I joined her, but she looked up with a flash in her eyes as she said,—

"Of course Ahab has come about the vineyard; do you think he will get it?"

"I am sure he won't," I answered repeating dad's words; "so you may set your troubled little mind at rest, and if you are vicious you may triumph in the defeat of Mr. Vidal's plans."

"What is he like, Phoebe? I only caught a glimpse of a sallow face."

"He isn't sallow but pale, and really handsome, but terribly haughty."

"Oh! I know the sort of creature, 'monarch of all he surveys' and all that sort of thing. Well it will be a salutary lesson to him, I hope, to find a yeoman who actually dares to refuse his magnificent offer."

"Peggy, I did not think you could be so bitter," I began, when she interrupted: "The South Meadow was mother's favourite spot so long as she could walk so far, and then" the sadness leaving her eyes and the mischievous light returning "it will always be an eyesore to Mr. Vidal so long as he is not the fortunate possessor. Of course, if he bought it, his first act would be to close it to the public and us."

"I suppose so," I answered, and then each sat busy with her own thoughts until steps sounded on the gravel. It was our visitor returning, and evidently not in the best of humours. On passing he lifted his hat frigidly, but I saw a look of admiration leap into his eyes as they rested upon Peggy. He went a little way, then returning, said, "Miss Loftus, I have failed in my errand, would it be quite useless to endeavour to win your aid."

"Quite," I answered coldly; "my sister and I are your most strenuous opposers."

"Then I do not wonder I have failed. I presume Miss Loftus, this young lady is your sister. Will you introduce me to her?"

(Strange he had not thought it necessary to ask my father to perform the same ceremony for me!)

## CHAPTER II.

PEGGY was either shy or vexed, for she responded to Mr. Vidal's advances in the most frigid manner, and when he had gone said, indignantly,—

"He thinks he has shown us vast favour by his condescension, but it is easy to read his motive even if one is simple and country-bred. He thinks he can flatter us into pleading his cause. I hate him!"

The time came when I wished those words were true to their utmost letter, that my sister's heart had never suffered change towards him. But now I laughed at her flushed face and bright eyes until she said, reproachfully,—

"I don't believe you care a bit. I fancy you are even pleased because that horrid man spoke civilly, as though a Loftus isn't as good as a Vidal. As for being handsome, he isn't to be compared with Randal. I dislike mysterious Guy Fawkes-like men."

She preserved that attitude towards "the new man," as she insisted upon calling him for many days, much to dad's and Randal's amusement; indeed, the latter took a mischievous delight in rousing her ire against him.

Then, too, as he persisted in renewing his offer every time he met dad her anger had no leisure to cool.

Mr. Vidal was evidently not a strict Sabbatarian, for three Sundays passed without bringing him to our church, and then he came late.

"Naturally," said Peggy, "it was a pretty piece of ostentation."

He had stayed to speak to Squire Ellicott, of Ellicott, the neighbouring village, and they were still at the church gates as we passed out. I do not think Mr. Vidal intended to recognise us, but the Squire, who had been my father's staunch friend ever since they went to school together, gave us the friendliest greeting, then his companion uncovered.

"What an age it is girls since you came out to Ellicott! I am afraid you have found more attractive friends than old Ben Ellicott."

Peggy regarded him with mock reproach; then, perhaps, because she wanted to sting "the new man," said,—

"That would be impossible, and you ought to know that no fresh faces or friends can ever be the same as old and familiar ones."

"Thank you, Miss Peggy, I feel relieved," and after a few light words we passed on. Presently we heard steps behind us, then a voice, which said,—

"Won't you take compassion on me and allow me to share the homeward walk. Our ways lie together until we reach—"

"The South Meadow," interpolated my sister, with sinister meaning.

Mr. Vidal glanced sharply at her.

"Ah," he said, "that is the bone of contention between us. I wonder if you never hankered after another man's goods?"

"No, that is a commandment I have not broken," she retorted; and spoke no more only on compulsion through the remainder of our walk.

"You were positively rude," I said, vexedly, when we had gained the house.

"Because I want to show that man we are not to be taken up and dropped as he pleases. He waited to see how Mr. Ellicott would act before he would so much as acknowledge us. He has got to learn that a Loftus commands the respect of all."

"My dear," mildly, "if you so hate Mr. Vidal why should you care whether he recognises us or not?"

"I don't care; but neither do I intend he should lose sight of our identity."

I had never seen her so angry, for by nature she was the sunniest, easiest of girls only like



most sensitive creatures, she was very proud, and it was long before Mr. Vidal could win anything more than the smallest sign of recognition from her.

The summer was fast fading, great improvements were already being made at the Hall, and all the pressure that could be brought to bear upon my father, was used to prevail upon him to part with that delectable meadow.

Mr. Vidal wanted to extend his gardens, to form a succession of terraces, an ornamental pond, and generally add to the grandeur of his homestead.

He grew positively angry when my father persisted in his refusal, and ceased to visit Hazel Dell Farm, much to Randal's satisfaction.

I remember it was one morning early in September, and we were hunting for the first blackberries in the hedgerows.

Peggy's bonnet had as usual been cast back upon her shoulders, her little sunburnt hands were scratched and stained, and her rebellious hair all loose about her shoulders.

It was in the middle of our search that we saw Mr. Vidal and one of his great lady visitors approaching (we knew afterwards she was his cousin Marcella).

I suggested that we should beat a retreat, but Peggy said "No, the chances are that he does not mean to know us;" and she resumed her task quietly.

It was as she supposed. I saw her soft cheeks crimson and her eyes grow bright; but not one word did she utter, until when quite opposite us, the lady adjusting her *pince-nez*, said patronisingly,—

"A pretty girl, spoiled however by that air of rusticity. Come here, child! what is your name?"

If Peggy was rosy before she was pale enough now, as she lifted her dark eyes to the haughty face of the speaker.

"That is a question Mr. Vidal can answer to your satisfaction, madam; and it would be well to remember it is not always wise to judge by appearances," with which she turned upon her heel and walked swiftly away. I, who followed more swiftly, overheard Miss Vidal gasp,—

"Who is that girl?" and he answered, "Miss Loftus, of Hazel Dell Farm."

"Daughter of the man who obstinately opposes your wishes? That accounts for her uncouth behaviour. But surely you are not intimate with them?" (this, with a fine disregard for my feelings supposing I had any).

"I know them very slightly, Marcella, and I—" then I could hear no more; but I do not think I was less angry than Peggy. When I overtook her there were burning tears in her eyes, and with a furious stamp of her little foot she said,—

"He is an upstart with an upstart's paltry pride. He thinks we are glad to be noticed as the humour serves him, but he is afraid to know us when his women folk are near. He could not offer a greater indignity if he tried. No true man would so insult an honest girl however poor and humble."

I did not try to stem the torrent of her anger. I was too outraged myself, only I did wish Peggy would not take such things so much to heart.

We did not see Mr. Vidal again for several days, and then he approached us with just the slightest air of embarrassment.

Each had heard his visitors were gone, each understood that he was now a free agent, and we waited for him to speak. It was Peggy he addressed, for which I was thankful, her words coming more readily than mine.

"I owe you an apology in my cousin's name," he began, when my sister interrupted,—

"And your own; but as the apology would doubtless exceed the offence, let it remain unspoken."

He flushed dusky, then said,—

"I am well aware that my conduct appeared bad, but, really, I acted out of consideration for you and your sister. People are apt to jump to very stupid conclusions when a man of my rank—"

"Stoops to be courteous to a woman of mine? Is that what you would say?"

"I am afraid it is, only I should not have stated the fact so harshly."

"Probably not; but a 'rustic' cannot be supposed to excel in courtliness. But, Mr. Vidal, you will please understand that a Loftus exacts the homage and respect due to a Loftus; and, as you have failed to offer these, let us agree we never knew each other. Stand aside, please, and let us pass."

"No!" and his dark eyes flashed, "I will be heard. Miss Loftus, plead for me; your sister is too headstrong, she does not understand—"

"At home they do not credit me with denseness. I do not wish to know you. I will choose my friends out of my own rank."

But he was inflamed with desire of winning her forgiveness, and I think he was angry to be defied by so mere a girl as Peggy, of rank so inferior to his own; for, stepping hastily forward, he laid his hand upon her arm.

"Listen," he said imperiously. "I have been reared in a very autocratic school, perhaps taught from infancy that I had almost royal prerogatives, and so cannot be 'in touch' with those around. If you would help me to overcome my prejudices of birth and breeding I should be glad; for, until I have done so, my tenants will have none of me, and all my plans for their benefit are consequently frustrated."

Peggy hesitated a moment, then generosity and a desire to ameliorate the lot of the villagers got the better of pride and anger.

With an exquisite blush and an arch glance, she said,—

"I dare not promise that my help will be permanent. We are sure to quarrel. I don't suppose we have a wish or thought in common—but we can try; and" (growing grave again) "your first lesson must be not to forget to give respect where respect is due."

Even then that compact displeased and disturbed me, although I could not tell why, and so held my peace. Still, I had no intention of allowing Mr. Vidal to amuse himself with Peggy just because she was pretty, and different from the women he had hitherto known.

So I kept strict watch and ward over his every look and word when, two days later, he came to the farm. This time it was to consult dad on some business quite apart from the meadow, and, as we were at tea, he was invited to join us.

To my surprise he did so; and then, when dad had gone out to settle some little dispute between our shepherd and his boy, we girls were left alone with him, Randal having left in the morning for Bradley, our nearest town.

Mr. Vidal at once moved his chair to Peggy's side.

"I wonder, and I have always wondered since we first met," he said, "why you displayed so marked a dislike of me."

She flashed upon him.

"Your perplexity shall end now and for ever. You wanted the South Meadow, the dearest spot on all the Farm to us. You thought you had only to ask and to have, and sometimes I was afraid you would prove too strong for dad. I used to liken you to Ahab, and, thanks to me, the meadow is known to us now as 'Naboth's Vineyard.' If ever you succeeded in robbing us, I should hate you in earnest."

I think he was a little angry, for his dark face flushed, and his voice was studied, as he answered,—

"That being the case, Miss Loftus, I will cease to hanker after that which cannot be mine; but I am scarcely flattered by the *nom de plume* you have given me. Of course, I am Ahab!"

"I did not intend to flatter," said Peggy carelessly; "and if you improve we will find you a more suitable alias. Why, there isn't a creature in Hazeldean for whom I have not a nickname, even to Mr. Grayson, the Vicar—we call him 'Balder the Beautiful.'"

"But why? He is probably the plainest man in the village."

"He is dreadfully ugly," said Peggy, adhering strictly to facts, "hence his name; and," punning execrably, "he is balder than a baby."

"You apparently value folks according to their personal charms."

"No. If Mr. Grayson were not as stupid and dogmatic as he is ugly, he would have escaped ridicule—but—oh, you must know what he is."

"I am afraid I do," beginning to smile; "we dined together last night."

"You have my sincerest sympathy," answered Peggy, with mock compassion; and as then dad's voice was heard calling her, she ran off without another word.

Mr. Vidal then condescended to notice me.

"Is your sister really 'Peggy'?" he asked, with some interest.

"Yes, nothing but Peggy. It was dad's wish we should have simple names."

"Not even Margaret?" he questioned: "really christened Peggy?—Yes? What an abominable shame to dower her with such a vulgar name!"

### CHAPTER III.

I HAD been from home three weeks, nursing Aunt Rachel, who was not really our aunt but dad's; and most unfeignedly thankful was I to have once more turned my face homewards. Not that I grudged my time or service, for Aunt Rachel was the dearest of old ladies; but, after all, there was no place to me like home, and then, too, I was just a bit anxious about Peggy. Before I left Hazeldean Mr. Vidal had fallen into the habit of dropping in at any and every time; at first he came in an erratic fashion, sometimes calling for three or four days in succession, and then staying away a whole week. But, after awhile he seemed to conquer his pride and prejudice, and openly came to the farm at every available opportunity; nor did he disdain to walk with us through the village when chance offered, which indeed it did with singular frequency.

I was not long in learning the reason for his changed behaviour (and Randal guessed it too), but not one word did I say to Peggy, because I would not put thoughts into her head that were foolish; and, although it may be a fine thing to be loved by a gentleman, it is not fine to be the amusement of his idle hours. Not that I thought my sister an unworthy mate for any, but I was afraid the new man's haughty spirit would never allow him to form what society would be pleased to call a *mésalliance*.

It seemed to me as I travelled along, that reviewing Peggy's letters in my mind, they were not quite like her, something of the frankness had gone from their tone, although they breathed tenderness and love for me; and my heart was sore for Randal; because, if you must know, I loved him very dearly, and it had cost me many prayers and tears before I felt I could resign him to Peggy without a struggle; I so longed now for them to be happily wedded, it would be easier to bear when once she was his wife. And Randal was so good that I felt her best bliss would lie in giving her life to him.

I thought of the many times she had protested her hate of Rodney Vidal, and I wished with all my heart she had been more indifferent, for passion springs oftener from animosity than a neutral feeling. I was still worrying about Peggy when we steamed into the station, to find Randal waiting to give me warmest welcome.

"It is good to see you again, Phoebe," he said, heartily. "Now you have come things will go on smoothly. You won't mind that I brought the spring cart; I thought as you have luggage it would be more convenient."

And when I had replied to his greeting, and we were well out upon the road, I asked,—

"How is it 'things' have been rough at the farm, and why do you look so much paler and sadder than when I went?"

He sighed, and his honest eyes were too full of pain to meet mine.

"I am a stupid fellow I know, Phoebe, but I'm not quite blind, and I can see what I hoped to win is further away from me than ever."

I stopped to assure myself of my courage and composure before I spoke; then I said,—

"You mean you cannot tell how Peggy regards you? Well, how should you? young

girls should not give favours until they are asked, and you have not breathed one word to her yet."

"It is harder than ever now, Phoebe, when *he* is always about her!"

"You mean Mr. Vidal. You had better hide nothing from me, Randal."

"Oh, I'll make a clean breast of it. Look here, I put it to you; when she sees him so often can she help comparing us to my disadvantage. I am a great, rough, uncultivated fellow, with but little to give, save my heart and my hands; he is a gentleman—handsome, wealthy, pleasant enough in speech when he chooses—and—Phoebe! Phoebe! I haven't the ghost of a chance against him."

"Do you think!" I asked in a very low voice (for I was full of sorrow for him and fear for Peggy) "that she cares at all!"

"I don't know; I try to hope not; but there is a change in her."

"She has had all the cares of the household upon her shoulders since I went away, and then it has been very lonely for her with you and dad out the livelong day. Besides, Randal, Peggy isn't a girl to take notice of any man's idle attentions, or to suffer them."

"But he *loves* her," said he in a curiously strained voice. "I've seen it in his eyes, heard it in his voice, and 'love, like death, levels all ranks.' Peggy may be the lady of the Hall if she chooses."

"But does she choose! Oh, how faint of heart you are! Wait and hope, but I don't mean you should do only those two things; whilst you are waiting you can work, and Peggy would be happier as your wife than as a great lady. She could not bear to leave us all, and that is what marriage with such a man as Mr. Vidal would mean. Now, not another word, we are all but home—and Peggy must not think we have been discussing her—she is so sensitive you know; but I will watch her, and tell you soon (I hope) that your fears have no foundation."

We drove up to the front door, and there was my sister in the porch, prettier than ever, with her clear eyes glowing, her sweet lips smiling, and about her head she wore a wreath of late clematis. Her gown was deep ruby, with ruffles of lace about the throat and wrists; I remember thinking I had never seen her so lovely, and there was something so new and beautiful in her shining eyes that I dared not believe was just joy at my return. We went in together, and were so gay that I forgot Randal's words, until after tea Peggy slipped out of the room.

At first I believed that she had gone to give the maids some directions, but Randal's distressed look and her prolonged absence, warned me that she had gone to keep some secret appointment. I was angry because not even Peggy was prouder than I of our good old name, and with a trivial excuse I left the two men together and went out. It was a moonlit evening, but I could catch no glimpse of my sister, not the least flutter of a woman's gown; it was only blind instinct which led me to the South Meadow, and there I saw her, but not alone!

Someone was leaning over the fence and holding her little hands in his. I knew, only too well, who that someone was, and my anger increased. I hurried forward, but the grass so muffled the sound of my steps, that neither heard them, and I had taken especial care to keep in the shadow of the trees, having no intention of letting Mr. Vidal escape me. When I was quite near, I said, sharply and reproachfully, "Peggy! Peggy Loftus!"

She started, and, with a little cry, snatched her hands from his hold, facing me, half-ashamed and half-defiant.

I would not let her speak, but, addressing her companion, said, "Mr. Vidal, you have made excellent use of my absence and my father's hospitality! Even as I joined you, I heard you begging my sister to meet you here to-morrow, at this late hour, and *secretly*. If she forgets what is due to her, I cannot; and you, being so much better versed in the world's ways than she, should scorn to take advantage of her innocence."

He stood there plucking moodily at his moustache, looking frowningly before him, and, Peggy,

with a nervous hand, caught at my sleeve, saying, "It is all my fault, Phoebe!"

But I would not listen to her. "It is *not* your fault; you never were deceitful until *he* taught you deceit. If my father knew this he would break his heart! You never thought so poorly of yourself, until *that* man came into your life, that you would make clandestine appointments."

"Don't!" she cried, in very anguish of shame; and then Rodney Vidal spoke,—

"You say truly, Miss Loftus, the fault is mine; in nothing has Miss Peggy been to blame; and I hope, when you have had leisure for quiet thought, you will acknowledge it is not so very dreadful an exploit for a man to win a girl's friendship. I may add, too, that there is no woman I so honour and esteem as your sister."

I am sure she hoped he would have said more, her face grew suddenly so white and weary, and the hand upon my arm trembled.

"You take a very poor way to show your reverence!" I said, for my anger had by no means cooled. "When next you wish to see Miss Loftus, call at the house;" and, permitting no farewell between them, I drew Peggy away.

For awhile we walked on in silence, then she said, in the meekest and smallest of voices, "You will not tell father, Phoebe?"

"That depends entirely upon yourself," I answered, coldly. "If you will give me your word not to meet Mr. Vidal again, I will promise on my part to say nothing of your folly."

"And, if not?"

"I shall tell father all; I won't have you made sport for that man."

"Phoebe! dear Phoebe! can't you see we are only friends!"

"Do not lie to me; you were never anything less than truthful until now. Oh, Peggy! why could you not be content with Randal!"

"Randal!" she paused, and began to cry. "It is only lately I have guessed he liked me, too, but he will forget; and you will be kind."

"I shall do my duty," I said sternly; never in my life had I been so angry. "Surely you cannot value Mr. Vidal's admiration more than your good name and our affection! If he had cared honestly for you, he would have spoken to-night; but he did not. He doubt he considers you good fun. You are so pretty, and were so proud."

"Say no more," she interrupted passionately; "You shall have your way, and I will forget I ever knew Mr. Rodney Vidal!"

Then we returned together, and, for the first time in our lives, there was coldness between us.

In the days which followed, Peggy bore herself brightly and bravely; she would not be weak again before me. As for me, I watched her outgoing and incoming like the veriest martinet. May Heaven forgive me if, in my desire to save her woe, I exceeded my duty, or made her days wearisome. I would have given my life for hers; but it was not to be. Oh, Peggy! Peggy! you understand all now; and see how my love never wavered—never grew less!

Mr. Vidal went away, but scarcely a week had passed when he returned. Peggy grew pale when she heard he was in the village, and Randal, who had gathered brightness since he left, relapsed into gloom.

We did not see the 'new man' at church that Sunday; but, as we were returning home, he met us in the open roadway. Peggy, remembering her promise, walked past him, white of face and lip; but I saw that she trembled so that she could hardly move.

He stepped before her, "Miss Loftus!" but but she would not answer, and I thrust myself between them, "Mr. Vidal, if you are a gentleman, you will not persist in your persecution of my sister."

"It is for your sister to speak, not you," he answered, quite rudely.

"Peggy, tell me my fault, that I may atone for it."

But she was silent, just because she *could* not speak, and I cried out, "If all that I say is vain, I must appeal to my father for help."

That made him furious.

"You are pleased to think I am a scoundrel, and to teach your sister a like opinion of me. I

hope when I have seen Mr. Loftus to-morrow you will do me greater justice. I have only one wish, and that is to call your sister wife!"

So he left us; and Peggy, sobbing, said,—

"How could you be so cruel! How could I be so wicked as to doubt the man I love better than life!"

Oh, Peggy! my Peggy! better you had died then, than have tested the worth of his love!

#### CHAPTER IV.

ALL the following morning I performed my accustomed tasks so awkwardly, made so many stupid blunders that the two maids regarded me with unmitigated astonishment; indeed I heard one whisper to the other, "Miss has got a bee in her bonnet this morning." "Else she's in love," laughed my second handmaid; but hearing I said nothing, Peggy was up in her room sewing, and dreaming. She had avoided me since the previous evening; I think she was afraid that any speech between us would break down her composure. The long hours wore by; the morning had spent itself at last, the afternoon had dragged its weary way to a close, and just as it was growing dusk Mr. Vidal came. I did not see him then; indeed so full was my heart that I had locked myself away from them all. It grew darker and colder; I wrapped myself in my cloak and sat shivering by the window. Would he never go! Would my father give a greater treasure than the South Meadow into his keeping! I almost hoped not; for what would dad do without Peggy—his ewe lamb! Me he loved, but I was so much older and graver than she that it was natural she should be dearest to him; and then *she was like mother*.

It must have been nine o'clock when a knock roused me from my bitter brooding, and a voice—her voice, said, "Let me in;" I rose, and opening the door without a word, looked down upon her. She flung herself upon my breast, exclaiming, "Rejoice with me, Phoebe, *he* has asked me to be his wife—you know how great a sacrifice it is for him, how he must have struggled with his pride before he could stoop so low—think how deep must be his love, and try to be good to him for my sake."

I thought of Randal, but I thought too of her as I kissed her soft cheek, feeling that no cloud must rest upon this first hour of her betrothal, and with all my heart I wished her happiness, whilst in my mind I doubted if ever Rodney Vidal could give her the sweet content which hitherto had filled her life. Much later I joined my father, he was looking anxious and disturbed, and when I sat beside him, he took my hand as though seeking comfort and help. "It is a great thing for our Peggy," he said, staring into the fire, "and if 'tis for her happiness we have no cause to mourn. But my dear, I would far rather have seen her the wife of some good lad, Randal for instance, than the lady of the House. He spoke fairly, I must admit, but I do not quite like Rodney Vidal, and I'm afraid for the future. I seemed to forget you'd both grown up. You will be leaving me next, Phoebe."

"No father, don't you know I never had a sweetheart."

"Then that is your own fault," he interrupted, trying to forget his trouble, "for you're a bonny lass and a notable housewife to boot. Phoebe, they are to be married next month very quietly—that is Vidal's wish."

"Of course we must bow to it," I said bitterly, "he has stolen the ewe lamb. It will naturally follow that he will wrest the fold from us too."

Dad was too sore himself to reprove me for my words. "It is a grand thing," he said again, "for her, but I doubt if we shall see her often; Vidal's ways are not our ways, and she will have to yield to his wishes. We did not separate until very late, and then came the worst ordeal; in the hall I met Randal; he was haggard and white, his eyes strange and wild, and when he spoke his voice was hoarse and laboured. 'It is true, I suppose,' he said, 'Peggy is going to leave us!'"

"Yes," I answered dismally; "oh Randal, I am sorrier for you than I can say."



"I know; but, Phoebe, I think I could bear to lose her without a murmur if only I could be assured of her happiness; if he fails to make it, may Heaven keep him out of my way."

"She is so pretty and winsome," I answered, trying to infuse some cheerfulness into my voice, "I don't think there lives a man who could be unkind to her; and if he did not love her dearly he would never give her his name; after all we have misjudged him."

As a suitor I must confess Mr. Vidal was most attentive, and his generosity knew no bounds where Peggy was concerned; but he was an autocrat, and exacted obedience from one who had scarcely known any law until now but her own sweet, wayward will. Sometimes she would rebel, but every time her struggle for the mastery grew more feeble, until with a sweet smile for him, and a half defiant glance at me, she said, "After all it is restful to find oneself not quite the strongest minded in one's circle—don't you remember, Rodney, you called me once a little, wild thing, and said how hard it would be to tame me—after all I was not quite so big a shrew as you imagined."

"Say rather that I am an excellent Petruchio," he answered, with a laugh, and gently drew her towards him; as I went away I saw her lying in his arms, her face upturned to receive the caress to which she would respond with all her soul. Oh Peggy! my Peggy! it was not often after this I saw your face so radiant with happiness! Heaven had been kinder to take you then in the flush of your joy, so that we might remember you as you were before grief and sickness played such havoc with your beauty. The preparations for the wedding went on apace; the ceremony itself was not to be after the fashion we had pictured. Mr. Vidal declared he hated a fuss, could not endure the vulgar curiosity of the villagers; so it was resolved that he and Peggy should be married by special license at a church in the west end of London where a friend of his officiated. With that purpose in view, we went to town, father, Peggy, and I, poor Randal remaining behind. There were no guests; my sister wore a pretty lavender silk gown, and carried a small bouquet; I had donned a white frock for the occasion, but it looked limp and out of place in that great gloomy church, on that dull November morning. When we came out there were no familiar faces to beam a welcome or farewell to the bride, and I think Peggy missed such little things.

But if she did, she said nothing, and we all drove back to the hotel where an elaborate breakfast was prepared for us. But none of us seemed inclined to do justice to the fare, and as the hour for parting drew near my heart grew heavier and heavier until I scarcely could refrain from sobbing. At last, the dreaded moment arrived; Peggy had changed her dress for a pretty brown travelling suit, made in Miss Skirton's best style, but I thought Mr. Vidal glanced disapprovingly at it, and felt unreasonably angry; then Peggy and I kissed but neither could speak, and with a little sob she released herself from my hold. With her arms about dad's neck she embraced him many times, then her grief would have way and she burst into passionate tears.

Mr. Vidal's dark brows contracted, as he said in a curiously low tone,—

"Pray do not make a scene; remember what you owe to yourself and me."

I wanted to strike him then. As if one could remember forms and ceremonies at such a moment! But with an almost superhuman effort, Peggy recovered herself so far as to say: "I was very stupid, dear, but now I am going to be brave," and as he led her down the stairs, she turned to look at us, to the last smiling through her tears. Dad's hand was heavy on my shoulder as he said "Let us go home; the sunlight has flown with our Peggy, and a little thing wearies me now—I am getting an old man. Heaven grant I may live to see her happiness endure; it would break my heart to feel I had given her to one who did not value or cherish the gift."

Our return was a very dreary affair, Randal met us, but he looked so wan and distressed that he only added to our wretchedness; so that what with the excitement and fatigue of the day, when

I entered the sitting room, so desolate without her bright presence, I broke down utterly and cried as though my very heart would break, instead of comforting dad and Randal as I ought to have done.

Peggy's husband took her to many strange, foreign places; they had purposed returning for Christmas, but that glad time went by without bringing our darling; then followed January and February; I fancied that a tone of sadness had crept into her letters, but as dad noticed nothing I held my peace; it might be only that she was homesick, for Peggy's was a "remembering" heart, and she had never been parted from us before. In March, however, she wrote gaily "Rejoice with me, my darling Lady Prim; we are travelling post haste to England, but we cannot make speed enough to satisfy my impatient spirit. Oh, to see you again! How I shall talk! How you will open your pretty grey eyes upon me—do you know how pretty they are? how it rests one just to look into their quiet depths? I have blossomed into a fine lady, but not too fine to love you and the dear dad less, rather more, and there are actually times when I who have a somewhat comfortable opinion of myself, feel very much like a crow decked in peacock's feathers. I cannot stay to write more, but proclaim it on the housetops, "She cometh, she cometh, and oh! that I could join in the shout. How we would wake the sleeping echoes!"

The days dragged by; March was half gone when she wrote again, just a brief letter in which she said, "We are settled at Prince's Gate for some weeks; my husband is anxious I should see society. I cannot tell you quite when we shall return to Hazeldean, but he bids me say that if you can spare Tuesday and Wednesday of next week he shall be pleased to welcome you."

"My husband! not my dear husband, not even Rodney," said dad, moving uneasily in his chair; "what does that mean Phoebe?"

"That you are fanciful dad," I answered, far more cheerfully than I felt.

"No, in all the years we were wed, your mother never called me aught but her 'dear' and her 'Peregrine.'"

"Fashions have changed since then; because our grandmothers wore caps when they were mere girls, it's no reason that we should follow their example; and dad, Mr. Vidal's world is not our world. So, even though I am longing to see Peggy until I am half sick with longing, I shall not go to her; I must possess my soul with patience until she comes."

"No," he almost shouted, "there's something wrong, and you must go; I shall not rest until you bring me word my fears are groundless; and you shall take with you as big a purse as any county madam. I don't want you to accept his grudging hospitality—don't you notice you are asked just for Tuesday and Wednesday."

All day he dwelt upon that theme, all day I tried to alter his resolve; but when Randal added his entreaties to dad's, I could no longer resist, and on Tuesday I travelled to town. A smart brougham carried me to Mr. Vidal's town house; no one apparently had thought it necessary to meet me, and feeling very much snubbed I entered the spacious hall to be greeted by Miss Marcella Vidal. She frostily smiled, as frostily offered the extreme tips of her fingers as she remarked, "You have had a long journey, Miss Loftus, and will like to rest a little before seeing Mrs. Vidal; she is out at present, but I can perform her duties in her absence; pray let me take you to your room."

With a heart swelling with anger and pain I suffered her to do as she listed with me. But oh, what had come to Peggy that she was so changed?

If she had wanted me why had she not met me? If she did not need me why had she sent for me?

#### CHAPTER V.

I HAD just completed my toilet, and was wondering miserably what I should do next, when Miss Vidal entered. She gave one brief, half-amused glance at my blue gown, and then said,—

"Shall we be going down? Mr. and Mrs. Vidal will join us shortly. There are no guests save yourself; we are not entertaining either to-night or to-morrow."

"I suppose that is the reason why Tuesday and Wednesday were expressly mentioned in the invite I received?" I said, bluntly, "If my sister is ashamed of me now that she has many friends, I should do well to return home."

Marcella smiled.

"You remind me so much of her in your—ingenousness (I know she wanted to say *gaucherie*), naturally we thought you would prefer her exclusive society;" and then, whilst I was covered with confusion, the door opened, and Mr. Vidal, with Peggy on his arm, entered.

What a beautiful but changed Peggy! She wore ruby silk, her pretty arms and neck were bare, save for the flashing stones about them. Her face was thinner than it used to be, and the lovely roses were gone from her cheeks; but she was more beautiful than ever, only she seemed so far away from me.

Then a mist came before my eyes; through that mist I saw her moving quickly towards me, and through all my dazed condition heard her passionate, yearning cry, "Phoebe, oh my darling, darling Phoebe!" then her arms were about my neck, our lips were meeting, when through all our rapture struck a cold voice uttering the one word "Margaret!"

I did not loose her, I hardly understood what was meant, but I felt her shiver as she drew back from me, "Margaret, I am sorry you should so quickly forget!"

Her lovely face changed and hardened, she laughed, as I pray Heaven I may never hear my child laugh.

"Oh, yes, Rodney, and, indeed, I am sorry, but the savage will still break out in me; still I live in the hope that I shall yet do credit to Marcella's training and your admonitions. Phoebe, whilst you are here will you try to remember that the crow is hatched into a dove, and plain Peggy has become dignified Margaret."

Mr. Vidal frowned; but merely remarking,— "It is test you should understand, Miss Loftus, that I object to the use of my wife's very unfortunate name. We have agreed to interpret it as Margaret;" then he gave me his arm and led me in.

The dinner was a stately and solemn function, laughter or cheerful conversation being wholly out of the question; and when it ended there was no improvement in our state, for my brother-in-law accompanied us to the drawing-room.

It did not need any word to tell me how matters stood. I saw plainly that Mr. Vidal was ashamed of his wife's origin and pretty natural manner.

I even thought he did not love her (Heaven forgive me, for I wronged him there), and he had called in his cousin's aid to assist in moulding her into a society woman—our Peggy, our bonnie Peggy! All that was real in her was to be suppressed. Little by little Marcella's authority supplanted hers; little by little she had taught Rodney to doubt his wife's ability to wear her honours, to govern her household with propriety; and, thanks to Marcella, he now refused to permit her to exchange visits with us. Before my brief stay ended he even admitted he was sorry he had purchased Hazelwood House, "for many reasons," and he did not think he should again occupy it.

And Peggy bore it all with wonderful patience, with a meekness I had never dreamed she possessed. Only when the hour for our parting arrived she ran into my room, and nestling to me, said,—

"Don't tell dad, he would not understand. Rodney is a proud man and I am very stupid, I vex him often; but he loves me dearly, and when I have learned all it is necessary I should, I know I shall be a happy woman. I have often heard that one's first year of marriage is not so felicitous as later ones, not that I have any cause for regret," she added, quickly, "you will neither say nor think that. Give my dear love to dad, tell him I hope to see him very soon, and—and that I am the most enviable of women. You won't misjudge Rodney, if ever I have reason to complain it is of Marcella, and—and she means well,

she is going to 'make me quite a lady,' and then she fell to weeping passionately, so that when we went downstairs together Mr. Vidal said, coldly,—

"You have been crying again, Margaret. When will you realise that composure is the first thing a gentlewoman learns!"

"I am very sorry, but Phoebe and I do not often meet," began Peggy, when Miss Vidal broke in.

"Rodney, you expect too much. Really, Margaret is much improved, and the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere is not easily acquired."

"Mr. Vidal was well satisfied with Peggy's deportment and conversation before marriage," I interrupted quickly; but the poor child pressed my arm in mute entreaty for silence, so that I left the field worsted.

I am sure from the moment of my return dad guessed something of the nature of affairs, although he said so little; but I was never good at deceit, in fact, Peggy and I had been trained to abhor it; only I know as the days crept by and her letters became fewer, the cloud hanging over us grew heavier and darker, until from being as large as a man's hand it covered the whole sky.

April, May, June, and then July passed, and still Peggy did not return to gladden our hearts. The season was ended. Mr. Vidal had almost consented to allow a short visit at its close, but instead he wrote that he and Peggy were going on a tour through the Highlands.

Then my father waxed wroth, and himself addressed his son-in-law, almost demanding that his child should be spared to him, if only for a few days.

The answer came quickly. It was cold and cruel in the extreme. He had no pity for us, this great man who had snatched our treasure from us, and now questioned its worth.

"We have it on scriptural authority," he wrote 'that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave only to his wife'; the same rule applies to the woman with regard to her husband. I stooped to wed your daughter, but I did not wed her family, and for my own sake I must rescue her from her humble surroundings. When she has learned fully to appreciate the sacrifice I made, to understand the wide gulf existing between her past and present condition, I may allow her to exchange visits with you at suitable times; but I must really beg you to remember that my wife is my possession, and that the law will not sanction any interference on your part in her behalf. For the rest, I must decline any further correspondence with you; if you attempt it, your letters will be returned unopened."

When he had read these cruel words, dad brought his fist heavily down upon the table.

"Curse him!" he cried, the veins showing big and knotted upon his brow; "may every unkind word to her be repaid a thousand-fold, may every pang he makes her endure return to him—may his life be miserable, and his death—"

"No, no, no!" I cried, carried out of myself, "you shall not bring grief upon yourself for his sake—curses come home to roost—leave him to the judgment of One who sees and judges perfectly."

"Ay," said dad, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay"; then with his white face uplifted he added "I leave it all to thee, Lord! I leave it all to thee."

To me those final words were more terrible than any curse.

Autumn was again approaching, and with the dark days I felt our trouble would assume even greater proportions; then Randal, who had long been restless, declared he was tired of Hazeldean and its monotony, he must go away. He had a nice sum lying at the bank, and he proposed with this to take passage to South Africa and start an ostrich farm. Dad looked at him blankly.

"Don't do it," he said, "if only for our sakes. Since she left us things have been dull enough for all, but if you'll stay we'll try to make the home brighter."

Randal shook his head.

"If she had not gone I would never have left you; but I can't stay here eating out my heart with sorrow and fear for her. There are times when I feel I must follow him, track him down, and crush the life out of his cowardly body—I can't stand it—and then what could dad say? He shook his head growing so rapidly grey, and went about through the week with gloomy face and drooped eyes.

Then for the last time we heard from Peggy; she wrote she was happier now Marcella had gone away to some friends for awhile, and she hoped that presently Rodney would bring her down to Hazeldean, adding—"Doctor Riseley, who is very good to me, recommends quiet for me, and dear, dear Phoebe, when my baby comes I hope all will be well."

After that followed blank silence, and then dad, who had long been ailing, fell seriously ill, and my time was so fully occupied I could not brood so much over my sister's troubles.

Randal was goodness itself, and for our sakes postponed leaving England, saying "You must not be left alone now, Phoebe, and you have no one to turn to but me."

In his weakness my father cried like a child for his lost darling, and I could not endure to see his tears and be unable to wipe them away or comfort him with hopeful words, so that when he implored Randal to go to Bournemouth where Peggy then was, I uttered no protest, although I felt how painful the errand was to him.

"You will ask her to send her poor old dad some word of comfort," said father, brokenly. "Tell her I am ill, probably dying; if she could come to me only for an hour I would be content. Surely Vidal will not deny so small a request. Hurry, my boy, I do not know how long I may be with you."

Now what immediately followed was told me partly by Randal on his return, partly by Peggy, long months after.

He found her looking very white and ill, but she greeted him warmly, just as the old Peggy would have done. She declared her intention of setting out with him at once; then Miss Vidal who had returned, entered (it seemed, said Randal, that my dear sister scarcely ever knew a hour that was not spoiled by her surveillance), and she loudly protested Peggy was unfit in her state of health to endure the journey; that Rodney, who was away from home, would most certainly forbid her to go; she must wait his return. The poor child was too ill and too wretched to persist in her intention, and as Marcella plainly showed she considered Randal's visit a piece of impertinence he left, bringing only a message from Peggy.

That was his story; here is Peggy's as she told it later on. At night her husband returned and was greatly enraged by the news Marcella conveyed to him; he was well aware that Randal had been his wife's lover, and he accused her of taking advantage of his absence to hold a clandestine meeting with him; he was mad with jealousy and spoke so insultingly, that she plucked up her little remaining spirit, and out of the fullness of her heart uttered some bitter truths.

It was then he applied a vile epithet to her—he knew he lied, only pride and Marcella had driven away his reason—and when Peggy flashed upon him, saying that she had lived to regret the day she met him; it had perhaps been happier for her had she married the man he was pleased to call her "low born-lover," with an oath he struck her. She staggered but she did not fall; she looked at him with bright eyes as she said—"You will repent that blow," and walked steadily away.

That night he and Marcella dined out—when they returned home Peggy had flown leaving no trace behind her.

#### CHAPTER IV.

We were sitting together, dad, Randal and I, in our pleasant parlour, where dad could just manage to walk with a little help, when a smart brougham drove up to the door. The next moment I saw Mr. Vidal alight, followed by Marcella, and half hoping that he had relented,

and even intended Peggy to return to us for awhile, I rose to meet him. But very unceremoniously he opened the door, and entered, demanding loudly, "Where is my wife?"

At that my heart died within me, so that I could not speak; but father leaning on his stick, lifted himself and said, "That is for you to say—there is much I have to ask you—yesterday Randal, here, saw her in her own home, to-day—"

"She has found shelter with you," broke in Rodney, "but you are not so ignorant that you do not understand the law with regard to recreant wives. Where she goes I may follow, and I demand to see her instantly—"

"You mean, you scoundrel, that by your violence you have driven her away," shouted my father; "as Heaven is my witness I know nothing of this, and—and—Phoebe—oh how weak I am! My child! my child! my child!"

He cried out those two words with ever increasing anguish, whilst Marcella regarded him superciliously, until waxing impatient, she said,—

"Rodney, that is the man who yesterday interviewed Margaret, and the man you have to thank for her disappearance."

Randal rose quickly, "Madam, take care what evil you insinuate. Mrs. Vidal is as pure as a little child; 'tis a pity something of her innocence and womanliness did not descend upon you."

He looked at her, then at Rodney; their eyes met—each were full of hate, but it was my father who spoke.

"What is it that Miss Vidal says; would she have me believe evil of my girl—has she taught the man who promised to honour and cherish her the same lying creed? Woman! out of my house, out of my sight, you slander upon your sex, you crawling creature, whose presence is known by the slimy trail you leave behind—out, I say, or I shall forget your sex and strike you," he lifted his stick as he spoke, and seemed about to assail her, but instead he uttered one sharp cry, and fell helpless to the ground. Mr. Rodney at once volunteered help, but Randal thrust him back, saying,—

"Not you—coward and cad—this is your work—why should you undo it?" and in the confusion which followed, I hardly know what happened. But when Doctor Forbes had been and given me all necessary directions, bidding me keep a good heart, for my father would probably rally quickly as he was strong, and had always been temperate, I asked Randal, "Did they go quietly?"

"Yes," he answered in slow, calm tones, "they had no alternative. Phoebe, she has left him, the chances are that when the hue and cry ended she will come home, but he must not find her; she shall never return to him. See, dear girl I will tell you all the truth. I bade him meet me after that vile woman had gone to the house, and he did so,—oh, the irony of it—we met in the South Meadow—and (here his voice lost its level flow) thank Heaven I mauled him dreadfully, he won't care to show up for days. And I spoke such bitter truths of Marcella Vidal that I think I opened his eyes considerably. 'Yes, yes,' I cried, 'but that does not help Peggy. Oh, Randal, where is she? My heart will break! It may be she is dead—she was not used to sorrow—and she must have been mad with grief to leave her home and the man she loved.'"

"If she is dead," he answered, "let him look to himself."

"All would have been well but for his cousin; she is at the bottom of all."

"I don't war with women, and knowing Peggy as he did he has no excuse for his conduct—curse him!"

In the morning we heard that Mr. Vidal had been making curious inquiries in the village, the consequence being that Peggy's name was on every lip, and some of those who had been her chiefest friends were now the first to believe ill of her. The cousins did not remain more than forty-eight hours in the place, and I heard very little of their doings. Then my father remained in such a precarious condition, and Randal professed to know nothing. But he had been very active in our service, inserting advertisements in all the popular papers, worded so



that they might meet Peggy's eyes and be understood by her; employing able detectives to track her down; but he could do nothing beyond this, and with sick hearts we watched and waited for her return, not daring to say to each other "*She is dead.*" Then, just as father was creeping back to some semblance of the old Peregrine Loftus, Randal received a lawyer's letter which agitated him greatly; I felt that life swooned in me as he made known its purport. Mr. Vidal had instituted divorce proceedings, and he—our good Randal—was cited as co-respondent. The case came on in the spring; but the evidence from the outset was of the slenderest kind, and public indignation ran high against Marcella; a skilful counsel elicited from her the method of her treatment of the young wife, her constant surveillance; and quite ridiculed her statement that Mrs. Vidal had ever entertained more than friendship for Randal Hirst. Some letters were then put in, written by him to Peggy a little while before her marriage, when she was visiting friends; but they only proved that he loved her, and surely she was not to blame for that. Then the visit to Bournemouth was referred to, but as he went at my father's instigation, and saw Peggy but for a few moments alone, it counted for less than nothing. Questioned as to his regard for her, Randal said, "It is true that I once wished to make Miss Peggy Loftus my wife; I have changed my mind since then—and hope soon to marry her sister."

Now until the night before he went to town I had heard nothing of this, but as we lingered in the hall, he said,—

"Phoebe, I am presuming very far, but it is for Peggy's sake, so you will not be angry with me for anything I may say. Let me go to court to-morrow as your accepted suitor—it will tell in her favour—and my dear, although I cannot give you the love I laid at her feet, I will do my best to make you happy, if you can like and trust me well enough to be my wife."

And then I was equally frank with him.

"I love you dearly, I have always done," I said, "and if it is for her good, you may call yourself an aspirant to my hand—but you are not bound to me in any fashion by your generous and quixotic offer."

It was well that we had that conversation, or I might unwittingly have hurt Peggy's cause, for almost as soon as I stepped into the witness box I was asked by the counsel for the prosecution if I were Mr. Hirst's *fiancée*, I answered quite calmly,—

"Not his *fiancée*, but he has done me the honour to ask me to be his wife; my father's serious illness has prevented any actual settlement of the affair."

Then I was questioned with regard to the occurrences of my visit. I did not deny that a certain young gentleman named Mr. Brabazon had called upon my sister on the second day; he had brought her flowers, but, I went on to say she was angry and refused them, afterwards bidding a servant not to admit the donor again.

It was insinuated that this was a mere artifice to disarm suspicion, and that Mrs. Vidal had been in the habit of meeting Mr. Brabazon clandestinely; indeed that from the day of her marriage her conduct had been characterised by levity. Witnesses were called to prove that, eluding her husband's vigilance, she had visited places of resort with her admirer, it was even rumoured she had gone abroad with him, and then public opinion began to waver.

Thank Heaven, it was not long before my darling's innocence was proved incontestably. Mr. Brabazon, who had been staying in Paris, voluntarily came forward, having seen the case reported, and in a very manly fashion gave his evidence. He frankly confessed that from his first meeting with Mrs. Vidal he had admired her, but at the same time he pitied her, seeing that her husband and his cousin were not so gentle and considerate as they should have been with her.

He began to pay her attentions, but she always repulsed him; it was false that she had ever met him save in public, and he could prove that she had never attended any place of

amusement with him. The last time he had called upon her, she had refused to see him, but at his reiterated entreaties had sent him a note by a servant, it was not sealed, and he now produced it for public reading. This was what Peggy had written,—

"For my own sake I have said nothing of your persecutions to my husband; now, I bid you, if you have any sense of honour, any real manly feeling, to remember I am a wife and your attentions are therefore a disgrace to yourself and an insult to me. If you persist in them I must acquaint Mr. Vidal with your conduct. Please to remember also that I do not know you from to day."

"P. VIDAL."

"That note," added the young fellow, "drove me away; sometimes I thought to destroy it, now I rejoice that I did not. I can't excuse myself, I behaved like a cad and a brute, but at any rate I should have been kinder to her than Vidal was."

This practically closed the case, Peggy was declared innocent, her name and her honour unsmirched, the petition dismissed, and some of Marcella's witnesses threatened with trial for perjury. Marcella and Rodney alike were received with hisses as they left the court, but his face at least was less sombre than before. I know now that he was glad to have Peggy proved loyal—afterwards I learned that the action would never have been brought, save for his cousin's vile insinuations, and that they parted that very day to meet no more.

I went home in company with Randal, and in a little while I received a letter from Mr. Vidal in which he said,—

"Margaret was rash and wrong in many things, most of all in her flight, which indeed induced me to bring the recent petition forward; had I not been convinced then of her guilt I had not done her this dishonour. Now, my endeavour will be to discover her and restore her to you, feeling assured as I do that she would refuse to return to me. Our marriage was a gross mistake, and, although before Heaven, I swear I love her still, I am convinced it is best we should remain apart. For all the trouble I have caused you and yours I am deeply sorry; but I maintain that appearances were against my wife, and that I am not wholly to blame."

Dad, who was listening to my reading, only murmured,—

"I leave it to Thee—I leave it to Thee! Vengeance is Thine," and then his failing voice died out.

I replied to Mr. Vidal very briefly.

"I cannot forgive you that you brought desolation upon her and spoiled our happy home. If you restore her living and well to us, my heart may soften towards you; but I am afraid she has ended all her woes, as so many have done before—in the river. If she lives where is she? and what of the child whose advent was to bridge over the gulf between you? Rodney Vidal, my sister had real reason to doubt and dislike your cousin whose influence was paramount with you; you had no ground for suspicion of her truth—her only error was *she loved you too well.*"

I did not receive any reply from him, perhaps he thought it was not necessary; and the search went on for Peggy, always fruitlessly; day by day father grew weaker, less able to fulfil his duties, more and more careless of his own interests, until one night he said, with half a sob,—

"I am spent, Randal, a worn out man, weary of myself and the world. I shall work no more."

## CHAPTER VII.

"NONSENSE," answered Randal seeking to cheer him, "we shall have you hale and hearty yet."

"Hale and hearty, with my lass wandering homeless through the world or lying dead at the bottom of some cruel river? Never any more, boy! and all power is fleeting from me, I am only fit to sit in the chimney nook and be tended

by the women. Then there's Phoebe; she will be left so lone when I am gone; Randal, did you mean you wanted to marry my girl—"

Our eyes met; he knew that I loved him, and that Peggy was lost to him; he knew, too, that I could never be jealous of her, or angry that he could not give me the best place in his heart; so he said,

"If Phoebe will have me, I stand by my word; she understands all the past and will not be miserable in the future because of it."

Then he took my hand.

"You said once you would consider this matter; give me your answer now. If it is yes, I will forego all idea of emigration and remain to search for Peggy, and I hope to gladden your life and your father's."

I looked earnestly at him and I prayed Heaven would guide me to a right decision; then, as a great sense of rest fell upon me I said,—

"Let it be as you wish, Randal; my desire is for your happiness."

Then he kissed me upon my mouth, and although ours may seem to many a prosaic, even a cold wooing, I have never lived to regret it; rather with increasing years I have been grateful for increased blessings, deeper love, truer reverence, and many—oh, so many more good gifts than I ever dared ask,—than I ever deserved.

Dad was full of thankfulness at what he called our sensible conduct, and said,

"I can give her to you with a glad heart, my boy; once I hoped Peggy would be your wife (nay, Phoebe my dear, you need not wince, seeing he has chosen *you*), because she was so merry and thoughtless she needed some one grave and staid to walk beside her—some one who would love her well and be gentle to her dear, delicious little failings—she wasn't perfect, if she had been we could not have loved her so well. But it brings tears to my eyes just to speak of her, and to-night we should be glad. Bring out that old mulberry, Phoebe, it is ten years old next autumn, and let me wish you joy while there is breath left in this old body. And, listen both of you—all that I have is yours, to-morrow everything shall be legally settled. You and yours shall inherit the old homestead on two very easy conditions. The first is that Randal take the name of Loftus on his marriage—that won't hurt much, my boy, seeing you have no people of your own, that you scarcely even remember them; the second is, that whenever and however my Peggy returns you will give her welcome and houseroom—are you agreed?"

And we answered yes.

Quietly we were married, and my father's health was so improved that he was able to accompany us to church.

There were no bridesmaids, and no breakfast,—in many things my marriage bore a marked resemblance to my sister's.

I had wished to remain at home, but dad said "No, Randal! the girl is worn with work and worry; she must have her holiday," and then he gave us a generous cheque, "just to help pay the expenses of the honeymoon," and he all along insisted he would not be dull or lonely whilst I was away, so that Randal and I were persuaded to follow our wills for a whole month.

We went to Wales, and returning from thence spent a few days at Clifton, where the beauty of the scenery delighted me beyond all words. I was almost sorry when the day arrived for us turn homewards; we were to travel from Bristol to Paddington, where my husband proposed we should stay "just one night, Phoebe, will make no difference," he said, "and we'll go to the play."

I was nothing loth, and having decided to go to Drury Lane, we spent a few hours in quiet; in the evening I dressed with care because I was anxious to look my best for my husband's sake, and when I came out of my room he expressed his pleasure at my appearance, which, indeed, was all the reward I craved.

Well, we went to the play, which I thought most wonderful, though I heard some carping critics say it was not so good as it might have been. Perhaps they were sated with pleasure, and so one could not expect them to feel the keen delight which I am sure was expressed in my

eyes and on my face. I was quite carried beyond myself, and I am sure that nothing pleased Randal so much as my pleasure.

We were not rich people, consequently we decided to walk back to our hotel, for the night was fine and starry, the distance very short to those who are young and active.

Chatting very much more than my wont, I hurried on, my hand comfortably tucked in my husband's arm; for a little while I had forgotten even Peggy, when suddenly above the roar of traffic, the hum of human voices, there rose a woman's sad, sweet notes, and the words she sang were familiar to me, for they formed part of a song Peggy used to love.

"Somes that are brightest may charm awhile,  
Hearts which are lightest, and eyes that smile,"

I caught my breath. "Randal," I gasped, "'tis she; no other has such a voice, oh, hurry, hurry," and we pressed forwards through the jostling crowd; whilst the wild, sweet voice pealed heavenwards—

"Yet, o'er and above us, tho' nature beam,  
With none to love us, how sad they seem."

I saw her then; just one moment the yellow lamplight fell upon her face, her wasted, lovely face; she was very poorly dressed, and in her arms she carried a baby—his and hers. With a shriek, I ran forward, and then occurred a sudden block, some one—a policeman—pulled me back by the skirts, asking gruffly if I wanted to commit suicide; the next moment the stream of carriages and folks had passed, and *Peggy was gone!*

I think I was mad for awhile; I rushed across the road calling her name, and ran along the street, forgetful of Randal, even unconscious that he was following.

And we could not find her; she had disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed her up.

I sank upon a doorstep, and burst into passionate sobs. Without Randal's support and comfort I believe I should have died of my grief. But he was very gentle and patient with me. He made me feel that nothing further could be done that night, and then, lifting me in his strong arms, he placed me in a cab, and so conveyed me to our rooms.

But what a terrible night I spent! How could I rest when I knew that she, our darling, was homeless, penniless, singing for bread in the cruel streets!

It was vain that Randal argued I might have been mistaken; that surely, if Peggy had been reduced to such straits, she would have returned to home and us.

I knew I had seen my sister, and I felt that pride alone, if not fear that he would find her and compel her to rejoin him, would prevent her sending us even a line saying that she lived. She would think it a disgrace for a Loftus to return beggared in riches, in honour, and love; and so she ate the bread of charity and drank the waters of bitterness to the very dregs.

We dared not linger in town, lest father should ask curious questions; and in his weak state we felt the truth must be kept from him at any cost. But Randal engaged fresh detectives, sent out advertisements through the length and breadth of the country, and all to no purpose.

My courage and spirits failed me. When I sat at the bountifully spread board, and looked at her empty chair, I felt that food would choke me. Perhaps, even as I, the honoured mistress of the house, sat surrounded by every comfort and some luxuries, she was dying for need of bread.

The tears would come to my eyes, although I felt how selfish I was to add to father's grief and Randal's burdens. Had he, my dear husband, been less good to me than through all our wedded life he has shown himself, I must have sunk beneath my burden.

Sometimes I would rise from the table, and run from the room up to that little empty chamber, which none other has ever filled, and there where she used to kneel I knelt, pouring out my heart in passionate prayer, until, being a little strengthened, I would go down to dad, to draw his poor grey head down upon my breast, and soothe him with my caresses.

Haslewood was in the market, but there were few bidders for it; it was so large an estate and the sum asked so great that most men were chary of buying what might prove a millstone about their necks. So presently it was shut up for an indefinite period, the agent declaring Mr. Vidal had withdrawn it from the market, and intended, eventually, to return to it.

Thus matters stood as the winter approached. Everybody regretted the closing of the chief county house—that is everybody who was anybody—and a great many of the ladies favoured us with supercilious glances when we went to church. I noticed they were generally those who made the loudest professions of christianity, but I know that they were the very first to fail in charity to Peggy and us.

Christmas was fast advancing, but at the farm we made only half-hearted preparations; true, there was the usual fuss over puddings and mince-meat, the fattening of choice birds, but not a guest was to be invited, because none of us had the heart to be gay.

There was a service at midnight in the parish church every Christmas Eve, and to this father and Randal went, more in the hope of killing time than anything else. I remained at home, having for some days been almost prostrated by a cold. I sat alone in our keeping room, which opened into the greenhouse, and I had not drawn down the blinds or pulled the curtains close, so that one standing in the garden could easily discern me as I sat pretending to knit.

I am not a brave woman, and I felt curiously timid that night; it seemed to me that some one was looking in upon me, but I was too nervous to leave the fireside just to pull down the blinds, and too proud to let the maids guess my folly. So I sat on, trying to forget my fears, and growing every moment more afraid, until I heard or thought I heard a low wailing cry.

I sprang to my feet in terror, and remained a moment without voice or movement. The cry came again; but this time I distinctly heard my own name called. I forgot my fear, I forgot that ours was a lone house, and I had only two young girls to support me. I dashed open the folding doors, ran through the greenhouse, and out upon the lawn.

There on the snow—it was a white Christmas—lay a dark figure. I knelt down, lifted the poor pale face between my hands, and screamed, "Help! help! thank Heaven! I have found my Peggy!"

She was unconscious. She wore no shawl or wrap—she, the wife of the richest man in the county—she had robbed herself of everything she possibly could to keep her little one warm.

I was wickered enough and bitter enough against Mr. Vidal to wish the child dead, until I looked upon its face and saw it had Peggy's eyes, the very trick of her smile—and then I loved it for its mother's sake.

I don't know how we managed it, but with help from the maids—and they were very good—I contrived to get Peggy and the child into my bed, and, as a bright fire was burning and there plenty of restoratives at hand, we set to work with a will to restore her to consciousness.

## CHAPTER VIII.

SHE lay once more in her own room, to which at her request we had removed her, and she knew us all.

Wasted and worn, old before her time, there was yet that upon her face which brought back the old Peggy to our minds; and oh! as she turned to her child the mother-love in her eyes was beautiful to see.

We had called in Dr. Forbes, and feeling that the secret of her return could not long remain ours even though we exercised the greatest cunning, we authorised him to tell it abroad, and with the assistance (unauthorised) of the maids the story was soon public property.

I can recall even now my father's face as he sat holding Peggy's hand in his fond clasp, and the tearful joy in his quivering voice as he spoke his words of love.

Randal at first refused to see her; but I put my arms about his neck and said,—

"Do not fear because of me. She had your best love. I am content to be your wife and to accept the gleanings after the harvest, and she wishes to give you greeting as her brother and my most dear husband."

Then when he consented I left them alone, and long after Randal told me all the gentle words she spoke of me, all the tender thoughts she nourished towards me.

She was very ill; but not even Dr. Forbes believed her sickness mortal. Peggy was wiser than we. When I sat beside her bed on the third morning she said,—

"How queer it is to think of you as a wife, Phœbe! but how blessed to feel you are sheltered by a good man's love, and that he did not think it necessary to take you away from your home and your friends."

She spoke so bitterly that I glanced quickly at her.

"Dear," I said, bent upon comforting her, "perhaps your husband did not quite understand all that he made you suffer."

Her eyes flamed from out the whiteness of her face.

"Do not speak of him," she cried, "he has killed my soul with my body. He ground me beneath his heel like the dust of the earth. He reviled my dear ones. He was ashamed of a man whose shoestring he was not fit to unloose. He loaded me with grief and shame—he and she, the woman who was his curse and mine; and last, he used a word to me which my father would have died before applying to his wife or child, and he struck me. I had loved him up till then, aye, as Heaven is my witness, in all and through all I held him dear; but he killed my love at last. Now, ill as I am, if I dreamed he would come to me, I would rise from my bed, and crawl out into the world again, for cruel as it is, it is kinder than he. Oh, Phœbe! Phœbe! there is nothing of good left in me! Pity me, for I have learned not only to despise but to loathe my husband."

Then I cried out in accents of horror, for indeed this was most dreadful to me.

"Peggy, darling I remember, he is the father of your child."

A red spot burned upon her cheek.

"True! but I claim him mine alone. I have laboured and begged for him. No one has any right to him but me. We have had hard and hungry days—I starved myself that my child should eat—"

"Oh, my dear! oh, my dear! why did you not come to us at first?"

"Because I knew my husband would seek me, and I had resolved to die rather than return to him. Then I was very ill. My baby, the heir to the Vidal wealth, was born in a hospital, and when we left that shelter we did so by the charity of the sisters and medical men. I am lowborn and ignorant," with a bitter smile; "but I knew that where I went Mr. Vidal would follow, and the law would not help me. I also knew that until seven years were gone my child was mine unless I should be proved an unworthy guardian. For his sake I would endure all, trusting to Heaven to show me a way in which to keep him always. Then I learned that he (Rodney) had instituted divorce proceedings against me. Had dragged my name through the filth of public scandal, and I dared not return to you then lest you should think ill of me. It was only when I felt the hand of death upon me that I ventured to hope you would take me in, and for my sake cherish little Frank."

"But you are not going to die!" I said, hopefully, for indeed I had not thought it possible she could be taken from us; but she smiled the saddest smile, and drawing up the sleeve of her night gown, showed her poor thin arm to me.

"Look," she whispered, "does not this tell its own tale! No, you must not fret, it is better so, better so! If I lived mine would be only a broken disgraced life. But when I am gone take my child, and for my sake shield him, love him, hold him dear as your very own. If Heaven shall bless you with a little one do not let him drive my Frank from the place in your heart; and above all keep him from that woman and his father. He must not



grow up heartless and cruel as they; remember, Phoebe, I trust you."

After that she was very quiet, being exhausted by so much talking, and when the doctor came, I asked him with tears in my eyes to tell me all the truth.

"My dear madam," he said, "so far as I can judge Mrs. Vidal is only weak and melancholy. I do not anticipate anything so sad as death."

She overheard and laughed.

"My heart broke long ago," she said, "my body has been failing ever since. It is not long I shall stay with you."

Alas, alas! the spirit prophecy was upon her. Slowly she sank. Through a dreary January and a bitter February we watched her growing weaker day by day, until her failing hands would do not so much as lift a cup to her lips.

At first she cherished resentment against Rodney; but gradually as she drew nearer the borderland her old sweet spirit returned to her, until one day she said,—

"Phoebe, do you know where Rodney is? if so, send for him. I have been hard and bitter, and I do not any longer love him; but I would like to be at peace with him before I die. Perhaps the fault was mine, perhaps I was as ignorant and stupid as Marcella said; but we will not trouble about that now. And, Phoebe, the child is his. I dare not wrest it from him when most he needs comfort, for I think he will be sorry when he finds me gone."

So we applied to Rodney Vidal's solicitor for information concerning him, and in a little while an answer in the form of a telegram arrived. Peggy trembled, and lay back half fainting amongst her pillows; but before Rodney could reach us she had regained her lost composure and had begged me to "make Frank pretty." I went down with the child in my arms to meet him; he gave one swift glance at him, then asked hoarsely, "Whose boy is that?" I held him towards his father. "Yours," was all I said, and he hid his face upon the little dark head a moment, and I know that he wept, for shining drops were upon the short curls, when he again looked up.

"Take me to her; oh God in Heaven! How mad I have been! Can you ever forgive me? Does she forgive?"

"Peggy was always more generous than I," I answered, and led the way to her room. Father was seated beside her, and even his dulled mind grasped the fact that this man before him was Rodney Vidal, the husband and murderer of his daughter. But he only murmured,—

"Vengeance is Mine! vengeance is Mine!" and did not cease to stroke the white hand lying in his big palm. I shall not attempt to describe the meeting between Peggy and Mr. Vidal; it was heartrending, he so abject in his contrition, so full of anguish at sight of her changed face, so eager with his protestations of love, so earnest in his entreaties for pardon. She hearing him with the gentlest smile, her sweet eyes full of patience and pity—for indeed she had gauged his nature, sounded it to its very depths, and being stronger than he, compassionated where once she worshipped, and felt no longer any scorn for all his shortcomings. Her frail hand rested a moment upon his bowed head as she whispered, "Hush! if you sob so bitterly I cannot make myself heard. Rodney, I am leaving you, and I am glad to go, because I hope—I pray—your life may be happier without me. But I ask you now to promise in all sincerity, that Phoebe shall have the upbringing of our boy, until he is old enough to do without a mother's care. She will not abuse my trust, or teach him to think lightly of you. I have not asked you many gifts since I took your name—grant me this. Oh, Rodney, it was all a mistake—our marriage—but the mistake will soon be mended now—do not!—do not!—do not!" as his groans broke out afresh, "you distress me; and I want so much to be at peace; I am so very tired."

He promised all she asked; I think he would have given his soul if that were possible, to save her life; but he knew—and, oh Heaven! we knew the end was very near. In the middle of the night, as I was snatching an hour of sleep, Randal came to me, "Get up quickly," he said, "she is

going fast," and waiting for nothing I ran to her room. She turned her dying eyes upon me, stretched out her feeble hand to me,—

"The summons has come at last," she sighed, "let me see my boy."

I ran to the adjoining room, and brought him all flushed and rosy in my arms to her; her eyes smiled, her fingers rested in blessing on his head, "Heaven make you good as you are beautiful, brave as a man should be, tender of heart. Heaven give you its choicest blessings, my darling one!" and oh, thanks be to Heaven, her prayer is abundantly answered. The end was nearer than we believed; just upon midnight we saw the change—the first grey shadow of death stealing over her lovely face, and with a great cry Rodney Vidal fell upon his knees.

"Peggy! Peggy! speak to me! Only say you forgive me—one word—one word of love—"

"Poor boy! poor husband! I fully and—freely—forgive. Be—good—to—my—little one."

She lay then for a long time very quiet, hardly seeming to breathe; she had hidden us all farewell in the early morning, but in her last minutes her thoughts were with and of us. She called us each by name; to each she said some loving word, and, even with her last breath, she whispered to her kneeling husband, "Good-bye!—do—not—reproach—yourself.—God knows all.—He is more—merciful than—the world.—We will forgive—both you—and—me—"; and her voice died utterly out then, and she never spoke again.

Oh, Peggy! my darling, pretty Peggy!

We buried her beside mother; from the South Meadow we could see her lowly grave, and I turned to my window on that sad night to whisper a word of love to her, lying alone in the dark and the dew. Then I stooped to kiss Frank, and, being very weary I fell asleep.

I was roused by Randal. He held a lamp in his hand, and was saying, "Phoebe, we can't find Vidal. One of the servants called just now to say his master has not been seen for several hours. You wait up with father, I am going with the search party," and, before I could utter a word of protest, he was gone.

Let me end my story as quickly as I may; Heaven knows it is tragic enough!

They found poor Mr. Vidal dead upon his wife's grave, shot through the temple by his own hand; and on him they found, too, a letter in which he fully vindicated our poor Peggy's honour, ending with the words, "I was a devil to the dearest, sweetest wife ever a man had; I cannot bear my life because of the remembrance of my brutality to her. I was never worthy to call her mine; and, she being gone I will not drag out so terrible an existence as mine must be. Am I mad! Perhaps so; I cannot tell—my mind is in a whirl—my conscience gives me no rest! Oh, Peggy, my darling! my darling! I come to you!"

Well, a merciful jury brought in a verdict of "Suicide whilst temporarily insane," and my father went to look upon the silent form, the handsome face set so hard in death; and, as he looked, he muttered, "I left it all with Thee, Lord; and Thou has paid my debt in full!"

Poor dad! he never went abroad again. Within a month of Peggy's death we laid him to rest with mother; and life went on sadly for us at the Farm, even though we had little Frank to cheer us.

By his father's will he had been left to our sole guardianship; a handsome sum being set aside yearly for Randal's use. So that we began to prosper mightily, until some that had glanced at us contemptuously in early days were fain to offer us the hand of friendship; but I am not a forgiving woman, I fear, and I could not forget Peggy, so I treated their overtures with scorn, and showed a spirit with which I had never been credited.

But that is years ago. I am sorry now for any mean or spiteful word I may have uttered. When one is growing old, and death draws daily nearer, one sees things so differently—at least that is my experience. Then Heaven has been so good

to me I would not—even if I dare—cherish angry thoughts.

Into our home there came a great blessing in the form of a baby girl, just a year after our darling's death, and we called her Peggy, hoping that in beauty and sweetness she would be the lost Peggy's counterpart, praying that her life might be as different as light to dark. And Heaven granted us all we asked, and, oh, so much more!

To-day I, an aged woman, see my daughter, a fair young maïron, endowed with grace, loveliness and virtue, the pride of her husband's heart, the darling mother of her two little ones. And I see, too, that Peggy's spirit rests upon her son, and that her petition is fulfilled to the utmost.

He is as "good as he is handsome," brave and tender of heart, blessed with all earth's choicest blessings, and I know that, when my time shall come, I can gladly leave my darling daughter to her husband's care. For you see Frank Loftus Vidal married his cousin Peggy. And so all wrongs were righted, and the old and the young live in peace together.

It comforts me to feel that in her happier home sister Peggy knows this and rejoices.

[WILL END.]

## FORTUNE'S MISTAKE.

—301—

### CHAPTER XV.

THE Beldens did not stay long in London after they returned there from Carlyn Court. Perhaps their creditors became too pressing to make the metropolis a pleasant resting-place for them.

The adventurer wrote to Dene (avowedly without his daughter's knowledge) to say that Iris had never recovered from the shock of the tragedy attending his cousin's death.

Change of air and scene had been ordered for her, but he was a poor man, and after all the expenses he had been put to in preparation for her marriage, he could not afford the cost of sending her to the seaside; perhaps, under all the circumstances, Lord Carlyn would assist him.

Dene, with all his faults, was not mean. He had liked Mr. Belden very little, but he had admired Iris intensely. He did not care to think of her as pining in London lodgings, and he sent her father a cheque for a hundred pounds, with a letter of polite regret her health was so indifferent.

"Only a hundred!" said the gambler, complainingly, when he showed the letter to Iris, "the man must be a perfect skinflint. What good is a hundred pounds?"

"None; if we pay any bills or you spend it at cards," she returned, sharply; "but if we go off to Brighton at once without anyone catching wind of it we ought to live in clover for quite three months."

"And then," demanded her father, irritably, "what is to become of us? You see your plan has failed. There is no hint in this letter of Lord Carlyn's coming to see you. He does not even express a wish to renew your acquaintance."

"You may leave that to me," said Iris, sharply, "I am quite capable of managing my own affairs."

"You did not manage them very skilfully on one occasion," he suggested, spitefully. "John Hill never went abroad, though I believe you bribed him pretty heavily to do so."

"What do you mean? He swore that he would sail by the next steamer; and he seemed in earnest."

"I met him or his double in Fleet-street yesterday. He looked uncommonly well to do, as though he had come into a fortune instead of being a ticket-of-leave man. You need not look so frightened, Iris; Hill isn't likely to cross your path again. He has paid pretty heavily for the pleasure of knowing you."

They went down to Brighton the next day, carefully giving out that they were going to

Paris, for the Beldens were rather addicted to crooked ways.

It was the beginning of the season, and the gay seaside town looked its best and brightest.

Iris, to whom the hundred pounds had been entrusted, decided they must not venture on an hotel, a boarding-house would be far cheaper and more economical, so after a few inquiries the pair took up their quarters at a very superior establishment close to the Aquarium.

It was quite up to date, the coffee-room boasting of a number of small tables, at which the guests could be as private as they pleased, while a smoke-room had been specially provided to attract masculine visitors, of whom there were a fair number.

Iris, in her elegant slight mourning, with her wonderfully striking appearance, attracted a great deal of notice.

Mr. Belden was perfect in his rôle of devoted father, confiding judiciously selected fragments of his daughter's history to two or three of the most talkative lady guests, till every one at Princess House knew that Miss Belden had been on the eve of marriage with a nobleman when death stepped in and robbed her of her bridegroom.

"My poor child bears up well," the old hypocrite would conclude with well-feigned thankfulness, "and the present Earl was passionately in love with her before his cousin's death. Of course it is quite too soon to talk of such things yet; but I think there is little doubt my precious child's happiness is only deferred, and that I shall yet see her Countess of Carlyon."

Miss Belden became a very important person at Princess House. The ladies there had for the most part never spoken to a peeress, and it seemed to confer a positive distinction upon them to be in the same house with a possible countess, and Iris, who was a skilful actress, never let them see how they bored her.

She was playing a very intricate game, and she was far too clever to lose everything by rashness. The father and daughter stayed at Princess House until the middle of November, and then one day Iris wrote to Dene.

She did not consult her father about the letter or even mention it to him until it was in the post, then she said with a quiet air of confidence,—

"Lord Carlyon will be here this week. Don't seem surprised when he arrives."

"What in the world did you write to him?"

"Never mind that—he will come."

The letter reached Dene just when the loneliness of his life at Carlyon Court was boring him most intensely; all the needful business connected with his accession had been got through, he was in full possession of all his rights and honours, he had given orders for the alterations which would change beyond recognition the two rooms most connected with his cousin Eric's terrible death, he was in wretched spirits and longing for some diversion when he received an envelope addressed in Iris Belden's large, clear hand; it contained a bunch of faded forget-me-nots and two lines of writing; beneath the printed address, "Princess House, Marine Parade, Brighton."

"If you remember giving me these, come," Dene crushed the flowers in his hand, and thought over the vision the sight of them had conjured up.

From the first moment of his coming to the Court and meeting Eric's fiancée he had admired Iris Belden intensely. He had flirted desperately with her from the day of their first meeting, had even told her frankly he knew, but for the matter of money she would have been happier with him than with Eric, and one afternoon, carried away by the madness of the moment he had adjured her to throw over Lord Carlyon and give herself to him. Iris Belden was far too wide awake to entertain the idea. She knew Dene was penniless, but, as through the strangeness of his grandfather's will, Eric had to seek Dene's help in making due provision for his wife, she could not afford to offend the young man, so she had fooled him to the top of his bent and even suffered him to give her a spray of forget-me-nots, which he asserted would bring him from the uttermost

ends of the earth to her side if she sent it as a token she needed him.

And now Iris had sent the forget-me-nots, she had written beneath them the one word "Come," there could be no doubt of her meaning; he had made love to her when his poverty and his pledge to Eric stood between them, therefore he was forced to marry her now when she was free and he had the power to lavish every luxury upon her.

"She's a splendid woman," muttered the young Earl to himself; "she'll keep me from being driven wild with these gloomy thoughts; we might let this place when we are married or shut it up and go abroad. I've been wretched enough these last weeks. If knowing what she does, Iris Belden cares to take me I suppose it had better be."

A note reached Mr. Armstrong asking him to come up to the Court on important business. It chanced he had not seen the Earl for two or three weeks and he was struck by the change in him, pale and worn, with dark rings underneath his eyes, a restless, excited manner, Lord Carlyon looked like anything in the world but a prosperous nobleman.

"What's the matter?" cried the agent in his hearty way; "have you taken a chill this damp weather, Lord Carlyon?"

The question was not an unnatural one. For over a week it had rained almost incessantly, the lanes were full of a thick soft mud, such as can only be enjoyed to perfection in the country; the very air had a damp, humid feeling, in fact the very sight of the outdoor world was calculated to give anyone a fit of the blues.

"I'm not sure," said Dene languidly, "but anyhow I'm tired to death of Norfolk and I'm off to-morrow for a time. There's no telling when I shall be back so I thought I'd get you up here to-day to see if there was anything to be settled before I go."

George Armstrong decided finally it was not a bit too soon; he thought he had never seen a man without any specific disease look so desperately ill as the Earl of Carlyon.

The agent was a capital man of business and soon mentioned several little matters needing attention, adding, "there will be nothing else pressing till after Christmas, and I expect you will be back long before then."

"It is quite uncertain," said Dene rather stiffly, "but I will write to you from London."

"I see you have begun your alterations: when do you expect them to be finished?"

"I've no idea; I told the man I should be going away soon so there was no hurry."

Mr. Armstrong hesitated just a moment.

"I suppose you will be seeing Miss Langley in London?"

"It is quite uncertain."

"My mother is very anxious for her address; I promised her I would ask you for it."

"Whatever for?" asked the Earl, with more surprise than was flattering. "Mrs. Armstrong and my sister cannot have met more than two or three times."

"I believe a young friend of my mother's has gone to live in London and she is anxious to introduce her to Miss Langley. My mother had thought of writing to Lady Darnley to ask for the address, but when she heard I was coming up here, she asked me to get it from you."

Dene gave the address of the Guilford-street lodgings rather reluctantly, adding, with a forced laugh—

"My sister is that remarkable thing of a woman who doesn't care for money. I offered her a home here; I was ready to settle a handsome income on her even if she preferred to live anywhere else, but she refused both my offers."

George Armstrong took his leave a little puzzled at Lord Carlyon's manner, but little guessing the step the young nobleman was meditating.

Dene tasted some of the pleasures of wealth when he engaged rooms at the Métropole, and enjoyed walking about London with money in his pocket; he hesitated rather as to whether he should call on his sister, but finally presented himself in Guilford-street late in the evening, when he felt sure she would be indoors, but a surprise awaited him.

The "girl," a new importation since the days when he had lived there, asserted not only that Miss Langley was not at home, but that she no longer lived in Mrs. Cox's second floor.

"She was here when I first came," admitted the little maid, "but she left all in a hurry like; Missis was sorry to lose her, she thought a rare lot of Miss Langley."

"Ask Mrs. Cox if she can give you Miss Langley's address," said Lord Carlyon.

"Missis is out sir, but it'd be all the same, she's no notion where the young lady went to; I did hear Missis say Miss Langley had quarrelled with her young man, and that was why she went."

"Is Miss Seymour still living here?"

The "girl" shook her head.

"She went much the same time as Miss Langley; them two was great friends."

"It's not my fault," decided Dene as he hailed a hansom and drove quickly back to his hotel; "I was willing to provide for Fortune; I would have given her a share of all I had, but she has treated me very strangely ever since Eric's death; I hope the servant is right, and that she has broken it off with Paul Hardy; I never liked the fellow, and my sister ought to do a great deal better."

Lord Carlyon did not trouble himself to make further enquiries about his sister; he went down to Brighton the next day, and put up at Hazell's Hotel, which was within a stone's throw of Princess House, then about four o'clock, with a strange nervousness he could not account for, he presented himself at Mrs. Barry's establishment and asked to see Miss Belden.

The hostess herself happened to be in the hall when the door was opened to him.

Mrs. Barry had a sharp eye for business, and came forward to interview the tall, distinguished looking man.

"Miss Belden was at home," she assured him, and in her own sitting-room; would he be shown to her at once or should the page take up his card?"

"She will see me, I think," said Dene, simply "my name is Carlyon."

Mrs. Barry felt that Princess House was receiving the patronage of the nobility at last, as she watched the stranger following the boy in shabby buttons upstairs, and then and there, with an extravagance that was perfectly reckless, she ordered one or two extra dishes for the seven o'clock dinner, in case Miss Belden invited her visitor to share that meal.

The visitor, meanwhile, paused at the head of the stairs, as though to take breath; perhaps some presentiment of evil warned Dene even at the eleventh hour not to renew his acquaintance with Iris Belden; perhaps his better angel whispered to him that Eric's grave was a living barrier between himself and the woman who was to have been Eric's wife, but, if so, he dismissed the warning as a superstitious fancy, and turned to follow the page just as the latter had reached the door of Miss Belden's sitting-room, a small apartment on the first floor, reserved for any boarder who chose to pay a handsome price for the luxury of a private sanctum.

The door closed upon Carlyon—he saw Iris rise slowly from her chair by the fire, and come towards him; he looked into her eyes, and the old glamour, the old fascination held him captive; he was glad that he had come, glad that he was now so wondrously endowed with worldly goods, the syren was not likely to say him nay.

Miss Belden wore a black velvet dress, fitting her like a glove, relieved at throat and wrists by an edging of white lace—not another scrap of triumphant, not a single ornament about her; but the plainness of the dress only set off the perfect outline of her figure, just as the dusky garb enhanced the fairness of her skin, and the glittering tint of her hair.

A little paler, a trifle more subdued than in the old days at Carlyon Court, perhaps, but otherwise unchanged, unaltered.

"I thought you would come."

"I could not stay away when you said 'come,' Iris," and he took her hand. "Let us understand each other at once. The barrier between us is removed. You are to me the dearest thing on earth; I am free now to tell you so, you are



free to listen to me. Tell me, my beautiful princess, will you marry me? Will you take my life, and make of it what you will?"

Iris Belden trembled with genuine emotion. She had told her father she meant to marry the new Earl, so as to retain all the advantages her engagement to his cousin had promised her; but she did not tell her father—she hardly owned even to herself—that there was love, as well as ambition in her intention.

She had never cared for Eric. She had barely endured his affection, had passively received his caresses, but with Dene it was different. Her present wooer she did love, as far as her selfish, world-tossed heart was capable of loving at all.

"I will marry you," she said frankly. "If I were good, I dare say I should send you away, or warn you you were blighting your life. But I am not good; I am just an every-day young woman. I cared for you long ago, at Carlyon Court—what an eternity seems to have passed since then!—I care for you now; and so I don't see why we should not go through the world together."

"We will," said Dene quickly. "But, Iris, there's one thing I'd rather say now, straight out—I can't stand a long engagement. I am sick to death of Carlyon Court. I want to go abroad, to travel and enjoy the world. Neither you nor I are slaves to public opinion; why should we wait until Eric has been dead a year? I want you. I am like a homeless outcast, and shall be so till I have my wife. Why shouldn't we be married at once, and you share my foreign wanderings?"

It was just what she wished. No one knew better than Iris how very fast the hundred pounds were going, and how very difficult it would be to go on keeping up appearances when the last of them had vanished.

"There's papa," she said frankly—"I don't know what he'll say."

Dene stroked her pretty hair caressingly.

"Everything is in my power, Iris, and I have no restrictions to fetter me, as Eric had. I propose to settle two thousand a year on you, and to make Mr. Belden an annual allowance. I am not a very good-natured fellow; I shouldn't care for a third person always with us. I want my wife to myself; but I should like to feel your father is provided for."

"It is very good of you," said Iris quietly. "You know, Dene, father would not have been so—so wild if he had not been driven desperate by poverty. You can't think how stinging the blows of poverty are, or how they goad a man."

"I think I can," said Dene gravely. "Now, Iris, I will talk to Mr. Belden to-night, but remember, you must back me up."

"You are not going?" said the girl, as her lover rose. "Do stay to dinner; or couldn't you put up with Princess House altogether while you are in Brighton. I know there is plenty of room, and—"

"I am only at Haxell's, so I shall be able to come over often," replied Lord Carlyon. "I must go now, but I'll drop in to dinner, Iris, for I really want to see your father, and get things settled as soon as possible."

So Mrs. Barry was made happy, and the new-flew like wildfire among the other guests that Lord Carlyon would grace the coffee-room by his presence that night, and a little rumour—which Iris did not contradict—also spread, that the Earl was engaged to Miss Belden. Iris had impudently christened Princess House Noah's Ark, when she first came there, because she declared all sorts of human creatures were represented there. She had amused herself very much by watching the various little dramas carried on under her eyes, but she would have indignantly denied that not one of the well-dressed, uninteresting people she looked down upon would have changed places with herself could they have known the dark secrets in her past.

There were eight square tables in the coffee-room, and a somewhat larger round one in the centre of the room. The three tables near the bow-windows were the most esteemed, and one of these had been allotted to the Beldens. A Yankee family on a visit to England, and a young clergyman, with a rich wife nearly old enough to

be his grandmother, had the two other posts of honour; the centre table was the refuge for waifs and strays, the units who came to Princess House alone, and were generally a trifle loud or a trifle depressed, varying from the flighty widow on the look-out for husband number two to the poor little old maid who had had to scrape and save for months before she could afford a week's holiday.

When Lord Carlyon took his place next Iris at the Beldens' little table, and every pair of eyes in the room were instantly levelled at him, he felt for a moment quite bashful.

"Do they always stare so?" he asked his fiancée in an undertone. "I'm sure that woman in red at the centre table looks as if her eyes would drop out."

"She's one of the goats," said Iris, lightly. "When I first came here I amused myself by dividing the people into two sets—sheep and goats—the goats are most amusing."

The remark grated on Lord Carlyon, but he did not show it, and quickly changed the subject. He and his father-in-law elect had a private audience later on in a corner of the smoke-room, at which it was settled for the wedding to take place at Brighton in the first week of December.

#### CHAPTER XVI.

PAUL HARDY left Guilford-street well nigh heartbroken. His was a grave earnest nature, he had staked his every hope on Fortune, and she had failed him. The girl he had believed as pure and true as the angels, had played him false.

He went back to the hotel where he was staying during his brief visit to London, and turned into the smoking-room. Most men would have sought solitude after such a crushing blow, but Paul had spent so many hours of loneliness in happy dreams of the time when he and Fortune should be together in a little home of their own, that he almost dreaded to be alone, lest these dead visions of the past should rise up before him to mock his misery. Solitude had never weighed on him before, but then he had never before felt so utterly wretched; he could not in the least understand his rejection; if Fortune was to share her brother's wealth, and had dismissed him because he was a bad match for an earl's sister, why had she gone back to the poverty-stricken lodgings. If she had known anything of the mystery of her cousin's death it was still no cause for breaking her engagement. If Lord Carlyon had taken his own life—and Paul's own impression on reading of the Norfolk tragedy had been that the Earl committed suicide—her relationship to the dead man was so slight no reflection could have fallen on her.

Try as Paul might to make excuses for his lost love he could not explain away her conduct; she had accepted him when she was poor, she dismissed him as soon as she was rich, she was a mercenary heartless creature, and he was well rid of her.

A young fellow near the fire was slightly acquainted with Paul, and had greeted him by name when he came in; this had been noticed by a tall soldierly man who seemed engrossed in a newspaper, for when he laid the paper aside, he spoke a word in a low tone to Alice Grey, and the young fellow promptly introduced him to Paul.

"This is Captain Fane, Hardy, he says you are staying with his uncle, and he would like to know you."

Aylmer Fane's hand was outstretched, his voice had a ring of truth and sincerity which attracted the young secretary even in his troubled frame of mind.

"When I heard your name, Mr. Hardy, I thought I should like to make your acquaintance, and ask for the last news of Netherton."

Paul did not refuse the offered hand. He realised dimly that Hildred Fane had been hard on Aylmer when she declared he was a prig.

There was nothing at all priggish about the young officer, but he seemed very much in earnest, and altogether too energetic to suit his rather easy-going uncle and aunt.

He took a chair by Paul Hardy, and spoke to him pleasantly enough about the Castle and its

inmates. He seemed fond of his uncle and aunt; but laughed a little when he mentioned Hildred.

"I expect my cousin has given me a terribly bad character. The fact is, Mr. Hardy, she and I never got on. My uncle planned a match between us from the time she was in her cradle, and I think we have each been anxious for the last few years to show the other we were not at all inclined to fall in with the arrangement."

"I had gathered Lord Fane's hopes were set on it," said Paul, frankly; "he is always regretting you so seldom come to Netherton."

"I don't 'fit in' with them," said Fane, frankly, "I'm honestly fond of my uncle and aunt, and I should like Hildred extremely if she were engaged to somebody else. As it is I am afflicted with a constant dread if I am in the least friendly to her, that she may suspect me of designs on her hand and heart."

"I don't think Miss Fane is at all a suspicious person. To me she seems most generously trustful."

"Perhaps you are a favourite of hers," said Aylmer, lightly. "When I first heard my uncle had engaged a secretary I pitied the poor fellow intensely. I imagined Hildred freezing him at every turn, and that young lady is a good hand at the process."

"She has been very kind to me."

"And you like Netherton? You'll forgive the question; but before I heard your name to-night I'd been watching you, and I put you down in my own mind as a man with a grievance."

A strange cloud crossed Paul's face.

"At least my grievance has nothing to do with Netherton," he said, quietly.

"I'm glad to hear it. Tell my uncle you met me, and that I inquired after them all. I always regret his son didn't live. I could have been so fond of Lord and Lady Fane if only this miserable match-making had never entered their heads. As it is I see next to nothing of them, and they're about the only near relatives I possess. When do you return?"

"To-morrow."

They shook hands and parted, neither of them guessing how closely their fate was to be linked in the future.

Hildred Fane was sitting alone on the terrace when she saw her father's secretary walking up the avenue.

Mr. Hardy was not expected back till the next day. Lord Fane believed his errand to be only literary business; but Hildred was pretty sure he would try and see his fiancée. As she noticed the terrible change three days had made in him she felt positively frightened.

"Why didn't you send us word you were coming to-day? Papa would have met you."

Paul turned to meet Miss Fane, and shook hands with her in silence.

"I am sure you are tired," she said, gently. "Sit down here and rest. Tea will be brought out directly. I am all alone, and I said I would rather have it here."

A blank silence. The girl's heart ached for her friend. She thought Paul Hardy only her friend, little guessing her own secret.

She simply dared not question him, and yet in an hour her parents would be home and she must try and win his confidence first.

"Was it the book?" she asked. "I never knew anyone who 'wrote' but one always fancies publishers as hard-hearted."

"These were kindness itself. They offered me better terms than I had ever hoped for."

"Then it is something else. I am quite sure you are in trouble of some kind. Is Miss Langley ill?"

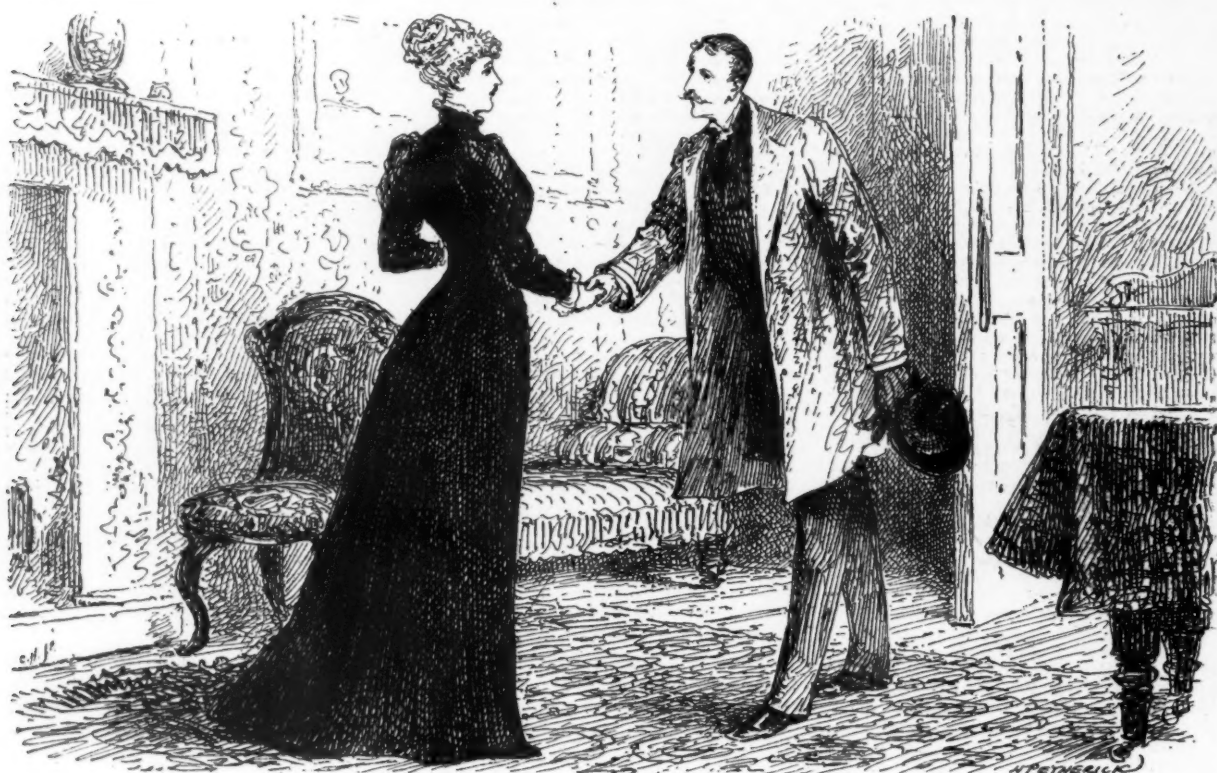
"I believe not."

"Didn't you see her?"

"Miss Fane!" There was a passionate anguish in his voice which made the tears rise unbidden to the girl's eyes. "Miss Fane, you once sympathised with me in my dream of happiness—it is all over now, crushed to the ground like a house of cards."

"You don't mean that you have quarrelled?" asked Hildred, breathlessly.

"Quarrelled? No! Miss Langley is a very important person now, and she—she thinks I am an unfit match for Lord Carlyon's sister. I am



CARLTON LOOKED INTO IRIS BELDEN'S EYES, AND THE OLD GLAMOUR, THE OLD FASCINATION HELD HIM CAPTIVE.

dismissed like a cast-off glove, and my life is ruined."

"No!" and there was a strange earnestness in Hildred's voice, "you must not say that. Mr. Hardy, be true to yourself, and don't let a woman's treachery blight your life. Fight your way to fame. Win a place and name for yourself, and then she will see what she has lost. Don't let her have the triumph of thinking she has spoilt your future."

Poor Fortune!

How cruelly this girl judged her; but then Hildred Fane, from their first meeting, had felt a warm liking and esteem for her father's secretary. How could she be expected to pity the woman who had been false to him?

They sat together on the terrace—Hildred and Paul—the girl asked no questions, she seemed to consider the whole story was summed up in one sentence—his *fiancée* had dismissed him!

She said not another word of his love affair. She talked of his book, of the fame it would bring him, of the time when he should have made a name for himself in the literary world, and as Paul listened to her, though his heart ached for Fortune's betrayal, he realised dimly that life still had something left for him.

Love makes or mars a woman's existence, but to a man it is not the beginning and end of all things. Paul Hardy had loved Fortune intensely, passionately—nay, unknown to himself, he so loved her still; but their parting did not bring to his heart the utter desolation it had brought to hers. He meant to forget her, to trample all recollection of the past two years under his feet, and, intentionally or not, Hildred Fane helped him in this resolution.

The rupture of Mr. Hardy's engagement seemed to throw him into closer intimacy with the family at Netherton Castle. When his book appeared they were proud of its success. The very fact that the young secretary had no home he desired to visit, no friends he wished to see, seemed to make him more like one of themselves.

Lady Fane had always liked him from the first. Her husband considered Paul's growing fame a positive compliment to himself and his own good taste in selecting such a gifted secretary.

By the time Christmas was drawing near, and Paul had been five months at Netherton, he had become far more like a member of the family than a paid assistant.

"Aylmer is not coming to us for Christmas," announced Lady Fane one morning. "He says he cannot leave London, but, really, I don't believe him."

"Lucy, don't suggest Aylmer's a liar," said Lord Fane irritably; "I expect it's one of his fads. Why in the world will he take up so many hobbies! Really, Hardy," turning to Paul, "it's very hard on me Fate didn't give me a nephew like you. You don't turn up your nose at our simple habits, or call it vegetation to live down here."

"I don't think Captain Fane does either," said Paul quietly. "I took a great fancy to him when I met him in London. I fancy he has got it into his head that it's painful to you to see him here and know he will some day bear your title; but I don't believe he is the proud, critical person you think."

"Well, it doesn't matter, I suppose," said Lord Fane, with a resigned sigh. "We have eaten our Christmas dinner without Aylmer before, and we can again; but it's a slight to Hildred."

Hildred grew crimson at the last suggestion, but she said nothing; only when breakfast was over she followed her father into his special den, shut the door, and putting one hand on his arm, said coaxingly,—

"I want you to do me a favour."

"A favour, child! I think you mostly do as you please with me. What is it? Have you set your mind on some superlatively grand Christmas present?"

"I want you to believe me—nothing in the

whole world will induce me to marry my cousin Aylmer—"

"My dear," interrupted her father, "I grant he's remiss, but I'm sure, when you see him, you'll—"

Hildred stopped him.

"I would not marry Aylmer if he begged me to be his wife on his bended knees. I am quite sure of it; I have known my own mind for months. Now, papa, my favour is that you give up talking as though you expected still (in spite of all I can urge) some day to have Aylmer for your son-in-law."

"Is there any one else, child?"

She grew pale as death; then, recovering herself, answered, with a little mirthless laugh,—

"Any one else! Of course not. I mean to be an old maid, and go in for some hobby, when I've lost you and mother. But, papa, indeed, indeed I am telling you the truth—nothing in the whole world would induce me to be Aylmer's wife."

She threw her arms round Lord Fane's neck and kissed him as impulsively as though she had been a little child; but he noticed a tear glittering in her beautiful eyes.

"If any one's been playing fast and loose with the child I'll never forgive him, Lucy," he told his wife afterwards, when he had described this scene to her; "and, upon my word, it looks like it. I don't believe our little girl would be so set against poor Aylmer if she hadn't learned to care for some one else."

"I am sure there is no one," said the mother decidedly. "Hildred is coldness itself to all her admirers."

So the parents blinded themselves, and never guessed what, indeed, Hildred herself was only beginning to discover—the fair young daughter of the house had given her heart to her father's secretary, had given the warm, passionate love of her womanhood to a man who had only cold, grey ashes to offer her in return.

The pity of it!

(To be continued.)





"OH, WHAT AN EXCELENTLY STUPID YOUNG MAN!" SAID SUSY, ASIDE.

## LOVE IN A MAZE.

—20:—

### CHAPTER XXIV.

#### POOR COLIN'S LUCK.

THE two Misses Dawson returned as they had come, in their own brougham.

"Susy, dear," Aunt Betty said wearily, "that silly boy, Colin Chepstowe, has asked me to marry him."

"You said 'no,' of course!" exclaimed Susy scornfully.

"No, of course, dear."

"Darling," whispered Susy tremulously, "Douglas Rex has asked me to marry him."

"And you said 'yes,' of course!" sighed Aunt Betty.

"Yes, of course, darling."

And then, after the fashion of affectionate, sympathetic women in such circumstances, they clung to each other and hugged each other, and laughed and cried together, and somehow were very happy and, at the same time, very miserable together, until their snug carriage brought them safely back to The Granary.

Well understood as it was by every one that the dance at The Granary was to be merely a friendly, informal affair, with no dress or fuss or extra guests arriving for the evening, some of the women of the Winterbourne house-party saw fit, notwithstanding, to put on their smartest garments—the untoward breaking up of the picnic affording an opportunity of startling change and new display—and presently they appeared at Miss Dawson's house as gay as if they were going to a regular ball.

The Chumleigh girls, as they had been at the woodland meeting, were the first to arrive—"those poor Chumleigh girls" somehow or other generally did contrive to be the first arrivals whithersoever they went, people said—coming over from the dreary Manor House in their

lumbering old family chariot, which always smelt of damp hay, and looked like a mourning-coach painted yellow; the girls themselves looking pretty much the same as they had looked at the picnic in the morning.

The Countess of Bearwarden had put on her famous tiara, necklace, and ear-rings, and arch Miss Flossie Larkspur herself glittered like a jeweller's shop.

As for the men, a few of them, from sheer force of habit, had got into evening clothes; but the majority—of whom were the master of the old hall and his phalanx of bachelors—sensibly took Miss Dawson at her word, and came in morning attire.

So that altogether, by-and-by, the scene in the fine old drawing-room at The Granary was a diversified and whimsical one enough; and the motley figures were reflected not only in the Queen Anne mirrors upon the dusky and china-decked walls, but also in droll, topsy-turvy fashion in the slippery expanse of polished black oak flooring beneath their capering feet.

And the gown of Miss Dawson, the hostess? It may be that she was hard to please on that night.

"Oh, Susy," she cried in a tired voice, and with a despairing gesture, "what am I to wear? I do not seem to care a bit what it is. You choose for me, dear."

Susy deplored the necessity of a change at all. "You looked adorable this morning, darling," she said lovingly, "in that salmon-pink and grey nun's-veiling. What a pity you cannot keep to it!"

"Impossible, dear. It is crushed hopelessly. That wretched boy, Colin, trampled it nearly off my back. What do you wear yourself, Susy?"

Susy, on reflection, said that she should wear her primrose cashmere with the bronze-green plush; it was good enough and it would do.

"Because we said all along that we should not really dress, dear, you know—we were supposed to come straight from the picnic; and I for one shall not whatever the rest may do."

And in the end, but chiefly on Susy's recommendation, Aunt Betty decided to put on a new black satin robe, faultless in fit, which became her wondrously well.

It was made with a narrow trained-skirt just gracefully long, something like a tea-gown, and with a body quite high at the back, and cut V-shape in front, the bodice opening being filled up lavishly with lovely old lace; similar lovely old lace edged deeply the elbow-sleeves and bordered her pocket-handkerchief as well.

Amid the lace at her bosom Susy fastened a tea-rose and some maidenhair fern, Aunt Betty's favourite floral union; and in the soft short clustering grey curls she put a diamond star, which burned and flashed and glowed with every movement of Aunt Betty's small proud head.

"Yes—you'll do, darling, I think," said Susy, charmed with her own handiwork; and then they went down together and welcomed the Chumleigh girls, who had just arrived in their musty old coach.

The interior of The Granary, on Colin Chepstowe's birthday night, looked, if possible, more hospitable and attractive than usual; for tall and flowering shrubs adorned and made umbrageous the massive double staircase; and Japanese lanterns and fairy lamps rendered dazzling in a subdued sort of way the great gallery window at the roomy stairhead.

The hall at The Granary really reminded her of the middle scene in "Dorothy," vivaciously declared Miss Flossie Larkspur, who was an indefatigable theatre-goer when at home with her own people in town.

From every ancient lattice upstairs and down ruddy light poured forth upon the now tranquil autumn darkness; and the dreamy sound of the band, which Miss Dawson had got over from Hooton-under-Edge, the county town, was just the one suggestive touch as it were that was wanted to perfect the cheerful scene. It was in its way an excellent string band, and something quite wonderful for Westshire talent.

For elderly "difficult" people, such as Lord

Winterbourne and the Earl of Bearwarden, there was a whilst room replete with every comfort, and with the butler himself in attendance there to look after the wants of the card players; whilst the dining-room was given over to supper and refreshments generally, in the fashion of a number of little separate tables—like the arrangement at a popular restaurant, or the quadrangle of a foreign hotel.

"My dear Miss Dawson, what trouble you have taken! How truly kind you have been—a good neighbour indeed," Lady Winterbourne said gratefully.

Miss Dawson, though looking direct at Lady Winterbourne, smiled a trifle absently.

"Please say no more; it is nothing—a simple matter," said she, meanwhile, in that busy small head of hers, wondering many things.

"Do you know, I am looking for Colin," went on Lady Winterbourne, feeling all at sea, and but ill concealing her anxiety to discover how the land might lie. "Have you seen him anywhere? Honestly I do not know whether he is here or not; for I have not exchanged a word with him since the morning; but I believe that he and Lowater drove over together in the dog-cart. I was told they dressed and started long before the rest of us."

"I too am waiting for him," Miss Dawson smiled. "He was to have had the first waltz with me."

"Oh, was he, indeed!" cried the mother eagerly. "Then in that case I have no doubt that—"

Just then up to them came the truant Colin in the flesh, hurried and hot; his smooth face very red, and his pink, near-sighted eyes uncertain and bleary. He tried to screw in his glass and failed.

"Ah, you, dear Miss Dawson! Not too late, I trust! Ours is the first waltz, I remember, Bet—"

He stopped him gravely.

"It is over."

"Over! No, can't be—what a bore! Well, then, the second, the third, the next, whichever it is; eh? Come along!" he cried, excitedly, trying to draw her arm through his, to lead her away to the dance then in progress.

She met his restless hot eyes with her own, clear and cold, and yet perhaps something more than a trifle sorrowful for his terrible folly.

"Not at all to-night, I think, Colin," she said, gently but firmly.

"Oh, I say, what a howwid shame! and why not, dear Miss Dawson? A promise is a promise, don't you know—"

With a parting glance full of sad reproach, she turned in silence from the graceless Colin Chepstowe just as one of the Monk-hood bachelors came up hastily to her, and begged of Miss Dawson to dance with him.

She smiled gravely, bowed compliance, and at once went off with the other man.

"Colin, Colin! What have you done! How mad of you—how reckless!" Lady Winterbourne said, in a sort of agonised whisper. "You have shocked her—it may be offended her past forgiveness! Too plain it is, you wretched boy, that you have been drinking more than is good for you; and from what I know of her, I am sure she is the very last woman in the world to countenance that kind of thing in her own house! Oh, Colin, how could you have done it, how could you have been so foolish; and then in that state to approach her—!"

His mother was horrified at the enormity of his offence, and further expression in speech failed her utterly.

The room, ordinarily a morning room, in which they were, opened upon the hall; but just now it was quiet and deserted, save for the presence of mother and son and the sound of the distant band.

Colin groaned; sat down suddenly; and planting his elbows upon his knees, he let his hot head drop into his hands.

"I am a beast, I know it," said he. "All the same, I am very fond of her—a lot fonder than I thought. I didn't know how fond I was of her until to-day. She's so merry, so light-hearted; such—such toppin' good comp'ny—and

—and, *mater*, dear, I've been trying to forget her—that's all."

To poor Lady Winterbourne a cold gust of air seemed then to sweep through that deserted morning room.

"Forget her!" she echoed mechanically. "Colin, I—I don't understand?"

Whereupon Colin, in his usual artless way, explained the state of the case. It must be admitted that his explanation was a rather rambling one, and he spoke a little indistinctly, but Lady Winterbourne, now, understood it all only too well.

"I asked her to marry me," he said, his face still bowed and hidden, "and she wouldn't have me at any price, that's the truth; chaffed me, in fact, treated the whole thing as a joke—and—I and I say, *mater*, she sees through you! Ha, ha! for what d'ye think she said! Why, she said she knew that you had put me up to it. By Jove, those were her very words. Ha, ha!"

And Colin laughed a hollow laugh, with no particle of joy in it; and Lady Winterbourne gasped.

It was all she could do. She almost got out "Great Heaven!" or something of the sort; but she did not manage it—the words would not pass her dry lips.

"Tell you something else, though," he went on, as his mother maintained a stony, unhappy silence. "We've been on a wrong tack throughout—have made an awful mull of it. By Jove! I never was so astonished in my life! What d'ye think, mother? She says she hasn't a penny of her own in the world—it all belongs to her niece."

"There's half a million, mother, knocking about; and—she says that she is simply the guardian and trustee, nominal trustee—deuce knows what that means, I don't—of the heiress, Susy Dawson."

"The real guardian—the real trustee—it seems, is a coloured chap—a blackamoor lawyer—out in Santa Rosa Island."

Lady Winterbourne's next sensation was one of violent indignation.

"It is abominable so to have deceived one!" she exclaimed. "And now I suppose Lowater—"

"Will try his luck to-night with the niece," interrupted Colin, sitting up, with a heavy sigh, and passing his pocket-handkerchief over his burning forehead. "Should he come off better than I did, he'll stop in England and marry her—well and good. If he don't, why, in that case we shall both cut the place for a while at once—got away, perhaps, together the first thing to-morrow morning. We shall go and shoot antelopes in Texas," said Colin, desperately, quite ignorant, however, as to whether there were antelopes in Texas or not.

"And the money?" said Lady Winterbourne, gloomily. "You'll want ready money for that jaunt, Colin. I have none, and it is no good asking your father."

"If it comes to the worst, we've enough between us to start with, and to carry us on decently for a bit," said he more hopefully. "And, somehow, do you know, I can't help thinking, *mater*, that, like myself, poor old Lowater is doomed to disappointment."

"I hope he is!" said Lady Winterbourne, fervently, thinking to herself that, should it turn out otherwise, the victory of her dear friend, Lady Bearwarden, would be downright insupportable. But, in the next minute, she had brightened in an extraordinarily sudden manner—even yet there might be balm in Gilead, thought Colin Chepstowe's mother.

"Don't grieve, Colin! Don't despair!" she said, laying an entreating hand upon his shoulder. "Fortunately, dear, there are more heiresses than one in the market—and I believe the girl is fond of you. She's vulgar, Colin; but, nowadays, that is of no consequence."

"Who?" said Colin, vaguely.

"The City man's girl, dear—Flossie Larkspur," said Lady Winterbourne, softly.

The Honourable Colin dropped his head on his hands again.

"Ah! I must think about it," groaned he. "I—I can't yet."

"Do, Colin—and don't forget," counselled his mother, earnestly, tears glistening in her eyes, "I've watched her lately, and she'd give her ears, I fancy, to be Lady Winterbourne and the mistress of Winterbourne Chase."

"Ay! in the dim and distant future. Not yet awhile, let's hope, mother," said Colin, trying to smile.

## CHAPTER XXV.

"LOVE IS ALWAYS YOUNG."

MEANWHILE the birthday-dance in other quarters was proceeding merrily enough.

Douglas Rex stood leaning his high shoulders against a door post, with the soft cloth folds of a *portière* behind him, not quite happily watching Susy Dawson, now his promised wife, revolving sylph-like round the ball-room in the arms of Viscount Lowater.

It had happened in this wise. Susy had said sagely:

"Now, Douglas, you mustn't be horrid, or jealous, or anything. Lord Lowater has asked me to waltz with him. If I say 'no,' he will only keep on bothering, and wonder why. If I say 'yes,' depend upon it he will ask me for something else; one thing leads to another; and—and, Douglas, dear, I think you will agree with me that it is high time that he received his *coup de grâce*."

In fond vigorous language Douglas did agree that it was high time Lord Lowater received his *coup de grâce*.

"He shall have it then," said Susy emphatically. "I will lure him on to the stroke!"

Douglas could not dance. At least he could in a way; but ladies invariably found that it was by no means an agreeable way. His brain was alert and quick; his hand was ready; but his feet, as Miss Flossie Larkspur would have expressed it, "were nowhere"—or rather, they were everywhere they should not be in a ball-room.

Already had he essayed a polka with Cecilia Chumleigh; but she had gone back limping to her sisters, complaining pathetically that the toes of her right foot were trampled almost to a jelly.

So Douglas had wisely withdrawn from any active share in the merry-making, and perforce contented himself with the part of a spectator of the scene—hence his position by the curtained doorway; his deep, keen eyes following Susy's every light movement.

Presently, when the waltz-tune grew slower and slower and finally ceased, Douglas saw Lord Lowater bend down to Susy and say something which no doubt, thought the uneasy watcher, was exceedingly sentimental and idiotic. Douglas felt savage—though he knew that Susy was to be trusted. However, what Lowater really did say was simply—

"I say, Miss Susy—er—suppose we go and sit on those jolly old stairs of yours, eh?" And Susy's frank, matter-of-fact reply was only—

"They are nice, aren't they? I believe one seldom meets with such a massive double old stairway now-a-days. Do you think so, Lord Lowater?"

"There's a—er—er well, a remarkably fine one at Lowater Castle, Miss Susy," said his lordship, in a rather affectionate undertone; "but then it is stone, you see. I should like you to see it."

"Stone! Ah, that must be rather cold," said Susy, thoughtfully.

Then, as a pause ensued, she added—  
"Ours is oak; real old solid black oak, you know. As you perceive, we are nearly all oak at The Granary."

"And we are nearly all stone at Lowater Castle," said the Viscount, "stone floors—stone passages—and all like that, don't you know?"

Certainly they were not making much headway, thought Susy. Apparently there was little or nothing to be got out of the subject of staircases, whether built of wood or of stone.

Together they sat down upon the third or fourth stair, as counting upward of the right-hand branch, just within the shadow of a flowering azalea in a square green tub; and Susy un-



furled her primrose fan, adroitly hiding with it a little yawn.

"Hot!" said Lowater.

"Rather," said she.

Oh, what an execrably stupid young man! Somehow his slow-wits seemed to paralyse Susy's—to render them as dull as his own; and yet she knew intuitively, as well as if he had already spoken out plainly, that there he was upon the verge of trying to ask her to be the future Countess of Bearwarden and mistress of Lowater Castle.

But the Viscount felt that he wanted "bracing" to his task. So he said:—

"Let me get you something cool then, Miss Susy! An ice—or—"

"Well," said Susy, who read him easily, "if you want anything yourself, Lord Lowater, you may bring me a little iced claret, please, and a wafer. Nothing more, thank you."

Lowater went off precipitately; drank a big brandy-and-soda; and presently returned—"braced," yet alas! only a degree or so bolder—with Susy's own modest requirements.

"Did you chance to see anything of Aunt Betty just now?" she asked, merely by way of keeping up some kind, any kind of talk rather than Lord Lowater should sit still there, close to her, and stare eloquently at her profile, saying nothing.

"Yes—I saw her. She was having some coffee with that literary chap from Monkshood, Douglas Thiogumy—Rudolf De Vere's friend—you know who I mean?"

"Indeed."

Susy froze; and Lowater warmed to his work.

"Yes; they were having some coffee together and talking about books or some such rubbish, don't you know? And I say, look here, Miss Susy, I think I ought in common fairness to—to—well, to—er—warn you—put you on your guard, Miss Susy."

Susy drank her claret serenely, placed the glass out of harm's way beside the azalea tub, and then said coldly: "Warn me! Against whom? Against what?"

Things were taking an unexpected turn.

"Well—er—er—perhaps it's superfluous, hardly necessary now; I—I mean, a warning, Miss Susy, don't you know? Because, you see, I want you to give me the right to—to—to guard you always, and advise you in all difficulties for the future, myself, don't you understand? Oh, I say!—Come, you must comprehend me; you must see what I am driving at! I—I love you, Susy. There—it's out!" Lowater perspired freely. "Hang it all! Why don't she help me on a bit," he said to himself.

"Pardon me, Lord Lowater. One thing at a time, if you please. If I have an enemy, a secret enemy, as you seem to hint, I should naturally like to be told who it is. You have aroused my curiosity, and you are bound to satisfy it."

"I didn't say an enemy exactly, did I?" said the Viscount, now growing horribly hot and uncomfortable. Her tone, her whole mien, in fact, had changed, he began to perceive; there was nothing helpful or encouraging about her now.

"But you see, I am not blind—in a general way," he floundered on. "And—and to-day, don't you know, I found him alone with you in the ruin in Rockstone Forest—you remember?—and—and," stammered Lowater—"Why, hang it all, everybody knows that these writing chaps are as poor as church mice; have never a shilling to bless 'emself with, unless it is a borrowed one; and—and are, too," with an awkward laugh, "the very chief and foremost of fortune-hunters when a chance of the kind comes in their way, poor dev—poor beggar, I mean!"

"Really," said Susy, with the same ominous calm, "you enlighten me considerably, Lord Lowater. But what a pity it all seems, if it actually be as you say—a thousand pities—a grievous waste of time; a wild-goose chase with a vengeance!"

"A waste o' time—a wild-goose chase!" echoed the Viscount hazily, feeling all at sea and more miserably ill at ease than he had ever felt

in all his experience hitherto. "I am afraid I don't follow you, Miss Susy."

"This hunting for a thing—a chimera—a something which has no existence whatever," explained Susy blandly, "save in the too-fervid imagination of the hunter. Still, I have reason to believe that Mr Douglas Rex, at any rate—I presume we are speaking of Mr. Douglas Rex!—is very much wiser in every direction than you appear to be inclined to give him credit for, Lord Lowater."

The fog was thickening, as Lowater expressed it graphically afterwards to Colin, in giving his friend an account of his defeat, and there seemed left for him no choice but to step boldly and riskfully out into the midst of it.

"Surely, Miss Susy," said he, with a simple bluntness that, at all events, had the merit of coming direct to the point, "you wouldn't choose a fella' like this—er—this Douglas Rex before me, would you?" And the Viscount looked, as he honestly was, staggered at the bare possibility of such a notion occurring to any one in his right mind. "You must admit, Miss Susy, that the advantages in the matter are all on my side," said he quite simply.

Well, since plain-speaking was to be the rule, so be it, then. Susy herself could be blunt, too. Besides, she would hear Douglas Rex abused no longer. It was time to rise up, figuratively speaking, and defend him.

"Advantages! That, of course, entirely depends on how you interpret the word," she said haughtily. "A moment ago you called Douglas Rex a fortune-hunter. Pray, Lord Lowater, what are you?"

"Humph! Eh! Well, I ain't that," said the Viscount rather helplessly, much taken aback.

"No? Then I owe you an apology. I have misjudged you," said Susy. "Frankly, do you know, I quite believed that you thought you were seeking in marriage the hand of the heiress of Oliver Dawson—that you had no honest regard for my poor self alone. It seems, however, that I have been strangely mistaken; have grievously wronged you; and I am sorry and ask your pardon. Yet, there can be no harm in telling you, Lord Lowater, that if, at any time during our acquaintance, you have been on the look-out for a rich wife, you should not have come to me; you should have gone to my Aunt Betty."

For the dear life of him he could not have kept back his helpless stare of bewildered astonishment. He was, too, painfully, horribly aware that she could discern, and was, as likely as not, laughing at, the blank amazement, the unveiled disappointment which were written so legibly all over his features. He found himself slowly and mechanically echoing her own words, in a dastardly tone of the most mercenary inquiry,—

"I should have gone to your Aunt Betty? But Colin said—"

"Never mind what Colin said. I tell you, you should have gone to my Aunt Betty," said Susy, with beautiful cold audacity. "As you so well and forcibly put it a little while back, I haven't a shilling to bless myself with. My father made Aunt Betty the sole inheritrix of his fortune; and me, his own daughter, wholly dependent upon Aunt Betty's generous instinct. Of course there were motives for this curious arrangement," said Susy, with a rather suspicious solemnity, for Lowater could see that her lips were twitching; "but they were family motives, you understand, and need not be entered into here."

The straw-haired Viscount replied not. He only stared on at her unblinkingly, with eyes round and dazed, and with weak nether jaw going gradually downward.

"But, in common fairness I should add," Susy Dawson continued with cruel bright mimicry, now literally rising to her feet as she addressed to him her few parting words, "that even were it otherwise, even were I standing in Aunt Betty's shoes and she in mine, it could make no difference—none whatever. I mean, please understand, as regards the high compliment you have just now paid me. I never could marry you, Lord Lowater

—never!—for manifold reasons; chief of which is that you are some three or four hours too late in asking me. My word at this moment, sir, is pledged to a poor man, who deems it an honour to have won so poor a wife. Therefore, for the future, should you speak of this man in my presence and in my hearing, I must request that you speak of him more respectfully; because his name is Douglas Rex."

With a little ironical bow she stepped lightly and fleetly to the hall-floor, ran joyously across it, and was gone in an instant from his sight.

As Susy vanished the Countess herself appeared through an opposite doorway; and, catching sight of Lowater sitting lonely and dejected there upon the stairs, she sailed up to him panting, and exclaimed,—

"Why, Lowater, you! all alone! oh!"

"It is 'oh!' I think," grunted he.

"My darling boy!—Lowater—tell me—what do you mean?"

Then as briefly and as clearly as he could he told her everything.

"Heavens and earth!" screamed the fat Countess; and feeling thoroughly upset, unnerved, and disgusted, she fainted there and then. So Lowater caught her dutifully in his arms, and shouted again until a wondering crowd came flocking to his assistance.

They proffered smelling salts, and fans, and eau-de-Cologne—the usual restoratives available at a minute's notice. Indeed, some of them talked audibly and sceptically of burnt feathers and cold water; but in the end it was a little champagne, tenderly administered, that brought the poor Countess to life again.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"AND LOVE IS NEVER OLD."

It was past eleven o'clock when Rudolf De Vere, by a mere accident, came face to face with Elizabeth Dawson for the first time on that night.

As at the picnic, so at the birthday dance—all day long had she avoided him with a perversity and a per-istecky which amounted almost to deliberate rudeness.

She could be sweet and gracious enough with other men, with her other guests; but there was never a word, never a smile for Rudolf—Rudolf, who was as the whole world to her, without whom the world was as naught.

However, they now met and confronted each other in the entrance of the supper-room, which was full and noisy—every pleasant little table therein being occupied by its separate party; and there was no escaping him this time—she at once perceived it.

"I am afraid—afraid, at present, Mr. De Vere, there is no room," she began, with a kind of chilly timidity that she found impossible to conquer. She looked tired, and white, and wistful, and withal very lovely—for her age and style the loveliest woman that breathed, thought Rudolf sternly, remembering how keenly he had suffered through her during the past few weeks of his life.

"It doesn't matter," he said quietly. "Candidly I want nothing here. I was looking for you, Miss Dawson."

Her own eyes quailed beneath his steady gaze; and she looked down; touching aimlessly the now withered rose drooping in the laces on her bosom.

"Really? For me?" said she, trying to speak carelessly. "Rather odd, that, is it not?"

"Why odd, Miss Dawson?"

"Simply because for the whole day long you have systematically avoided me, Mr. De Vere," replied she, perversely.

"Would it not be honest to put it the other way?" said Rudolf gravely.

"At any rate," she said, still wilfully inconsistent, "you have been most careful in avoiding me—us—for the last month; ever since you came back from Rathdonnell in fact. After all your protestations of genuine loyal friendship, on a sudden, as it were, you take to shunning The Granary, and—and practically cut us, Susy and

me. And not the shadow of a reason have you ever once vouchsafed us for this strange and unkind behaviour. Is that fair, is that kind or honest, Mr. De Vere, remembering the nature of our whilom friendship? Ay, it was a good friendship," said Elizabeth Dawson musingly, again touching tenderly the dying rose.

"I had a reason, though," Rudolf said moodily. "And why, pray, should my actions be irrational, motiveless, any more so than your own? Why should not I also have a reason for what I do?" she demanded in a low, quick tone.

"Even for your flirting with, for your making a fool of that wretched boy, Colin Chepstowe?" said Rudolf, with something akin to a sneer.

"It was not I—not my fault," Aunt Betty said, looking nevertheless just a trifle pained and ashamed. "To use your own words—he made a fool of himself."

"And you had no hand in it, then?—did not encourage him to do it? Women always say they are guiltless in these matters, I know."

She flashed an upward defiant glance at him; and then looked down again.

"And if I did, I had a reason for it," said she. "Part of which reason, I will own, was that Colin and his mother should be properly punished for their greed and their vanity."

"Indeed. And the other part?" suggested Rudolf, a little quizzically perhaps.

"I keep to myself," said Aunt Betty, turning proudly away; in reality to hide the tears that were gathering in her tired and wistful eyes.

"Well, do not let us quarrel," he said, more cheerily, resolutely barring her progress. "You have not given me one dance to-night."

"You have not asked me for one!"

"Have you given me the opportunity before? I am asking you now."

"My dancing days should be over," she murmured evasively. "Should not they?"

"Apparently they are not," said Rudolf, gently.

He offered her his arm; and she took it; her hand quivering in spite of her—uttering as she did so no word dissentient or otherwise.

"Half-an-hour ago," Rudolf said, bending his head as they moved towards the ball-room, where a waltz had just struck up for the amusement of the few who at present could find no space in the supper-room, and who, in consequence, were in possession of ample space for their exertions here and elsewhere, "half-an-hour ago, do you know, I had serious thoughts of doing what Colin Chepstowe is going to do. Have you heard?"

"No," said Aunt Betty, timidly; "what, I wonder, is he going to do—next?"

"He and Lowater, so he tells me, are leaving England for a while to shoot antelopes or some big game or other in Texas. I regret to say he was very drunk when I saw him last—yonder there in the card-room—but he managed to make himself intelligible so far."

For some seconds Aunt Betty's heart seemed to cease its beating; then to go on again and thump so turbulently that the heavy throbbing of it threatened to stifle her.

"And—and—you mean to join them, I suppose?" she gasped; and then gave a little laugh to veil her misery; such an unnatural and pitiful little laugh!

"Good Heavens! I join those two fellows! No. But I certainly did think of going abroad—somewhere. Where it mattered not—because I believe I have been everywhere."

"And—now?" she said, almost inaudibly.

"It depends upon you."

So telling her, he put his arm on her waist, and held her lithe form to his side with a hold so close and passionate that her small grey head with its burning diamond star rested against his breast, and her lips themselves were pressed to Rudolf's heart.

"My darling—my own beloved!" she said to herself in a wild whisper, with dumb secret kisses on the spot where her head was resting. "I cannot lose you! I cannot—I will not let you go! The world may say what it may."

And so together they went gliding over the wide black shining floor, round and round with the rest, in perfect step and time to the slow soothing music of the waltz, and now in the

bosom of Aunt Betty a palpitating joy so great that she was dimly conscious all the while that in it the element of pain was uppermost.

Yet she danced as lightly and as easily as if she were still in her first youth; and watching her, it was indeed difficult to conceive that that slim graceful figure in the faultless black satin gown was—the soft coquettish-looking grey hair notwithstanding—the aunt and the lawful guardian of a young woman of twenty-three! And soon all the world would be laughing at her, thought she, not without a thrill of amusement, for having given away her whole heart to a man in all likelihood young enough to be her son. And yet how heartlessly had she flouted poor Colin Chepstowe, when in the afternoon he had ventured *à propos* to instance to Miss Dawson the elderly Lady Aurelian and her young husband!

The waltz was over; sated folk were coming leisurely from the supper-room; and the late dancers, their appetites on edge, were hastening thither.

"The house seems very warm," said Rudolf, looking strangely pale for him. "The wind within the last hour or so has veered to the south-west—let us get a breath of fresh air. You are afraid perhaps?"

"Oh no! I should like it," murmured Aunt Betty.

As they moved through the hall, Rudolf espied a large white fleecy thing lying forgotten by its owner upon the back of a chair. The wrap was no property of Aunt Betty's; nevertheless Mr. De Vere appropriated it forthwith for Miss Dawson's benefit.

Tenderly he folded about her the soft white thing, drawing it over her head in hood-fashion as well; and then he opened the porch door and they went out together into the mild autumn darkness.

"Am I doing right in leaving all these people?" questioned Aunt Betty, meekly.

"Let us hope they will not miss us," Rudolf said; and, in a protecting, masterful sort of way that was a new experience, and an exceeding sweet one, to Elizabeth Dawson, he covered with his right hand the pale, clinging fingers that lay upon his left arm. "Besides, Lady Winterbourne and the Countess will look after them."

"But they are all of them really my guests for this evening, you know," she said.

"Never mind," he laughed.

And so she listened to him and did not mind; in her present mood she was too unexpectedly and deliciously happy to care for anything mundane beyond the delicious actuality of this sweet and memorable hour; but, with the heart and the feelings of a girl, she wandered on in the warm night gloom by the side of the young, strong and handsome man whom she now in truth knew to be her own lover!

Well, she was not the first middle-aged woman who had wrought for herself a similar triumph—there was the noted Lady Aurelian . . . and there were others—Aunt Betty could not remember the names of them now. She was by far too wildly glad and exultant to be capable of shaping her thoughts coherently—and, after all, true love knows not age—never grows old—for love is eternally young!

In a beautiful silence, broken only by the ghostly night-sounds of nature in the shadowy landscape around them, they moved onward together; in reality scarcely heeding whither their steps were wending. But by-and-by they found that they had come to the old kitchen-garden, with its tall quaint hedges of box and yew—close-clipped grassy alleys which seemed very still and mournful at this hour, with weird patches of dewy light lying whitely in unexpected places.

And then ere long the fish-pond disclosed itself, unruffled and chill and lonely, with a thin beam of the fickle hunter's moon falling fitfully athwart the dark surface of the water.

Here also it was very still and ghostly, as the mild night-breeze, like a troubled spirit, went sighing through the long reeds and grasses; and the cold splash of some hungry monster pike came now and then from a distant creek of the pond, where the deep weedy water lying beneath

dipping branches was lost in impenetrable obscurity.

There by the sedgy landing-steps floated in the darkness the old punt, stilly as ever. Rudolf stepped into it, turned, and stretched out his arms to Aunt Betty.

"I want you all to myself for a little while," he said. "We shall be as much by ourselves and as safe from interruption out yonder as if we were together at the other end of the world—or on the border, say, of space and chaos. Are you afraid to venture? Will you come with me?"

And, although Aunt Betty could see that pools of rain-water gleamed chilly at the punt bottom, could feel that her thin dance-boots were already soaked, and knew that the skirt of her dainty satin robe must be wet and dragged at least a foot deep at the hem, she answered gently,—

"Anywhere—with you!"

(To be continued.)

## OLGA'S AFFLICTION.

—:—

### CHAPTER XXIII.

NEIL was trembling. He heard the door close, and he knew intuitively that Morgan had left him there alone with his own wife; and, singularly enough, he had never felt in all his life a sensation that so nearly resembled fright.

He stood there near the door tongue-tied, his face changing from crimson to white, and it was Olga who first broke the painful silence.

She went forward and took his hand in hers, as timidly as a penitent might have done in presence of her confessor.

"Neil!" she said, gently, brokenly, "how am I ever to ask your forgiveness for the great wrong that I have done you?"

The old, sweet sound of her voice thrilled him. There was the same music, the same heavenly rest in it that there had been before. It soothed the feeling of almost terror that had come upon him, and over his face there passed an expression that was hard to translate.

"Olga," he said, softly, his voice scarcely more than a whisper. "Olga, it is you, my sweetheart of the hills, unchanged in spite of all that has occurred!"

He put his arm about her and drew her head down upon his breast, his hand stroking her beautiful hair tenderly.

A sob arose in his throat, and would not be suppressed.

"And you forgive me!" she asked at last, when her emotion could be controlled.

"There is no one thing to forgive, dear," he answered, tenderly, "and that is your lack of trust in me. After all, that is not a fault, for it is one I shared myself. I knew myself as little as you knew me. Will you believe it, dearest, that I feared to trust myself? Would you believe that I feared my love would die? But at the first sound of your sweet voice I knew that the love was still there, that it must endure to the end."

"Neil!"

"And you, dear heart? Do you love me as you did there before the trouble came, when we sat upon the hill-side and listened to the babble of the brook? Do you love me as you did when we stood before the clergyman, down there in the country church, and my sweetheart became my wife?"

"I love you as I loved you then, and as I always must love you, Neil."

He kissed her lips as she spoke the words.

"And there is yet another thing that I have to forgive, Olga," he said, gravely. "It is that you thought me capable of using the fortune which you were sacrificing your whole life to give to me. You should have known me better, dear."

"Ah, yes," she cried, "I should have known you better! I should have known you for the dear boy you are, and not the man I believed you. But I did not, Neil, and yet I loved you."

He drew her closer in his arms, he pressed her



head down further on his breast; and as he did so, for the first time in all their acquaintance, his fingers came in contact with the scar upon her cheek.

He started and shrank back, barely able to repress the cry that rose to his lips.

If he had struck her there in the first moments of their reunion, he could not have hurt her worse. He had opened his arms, and she slipped from them, standing before him and looking into his blind eyes in breathless, white-lipped horror.

He seemed to feel what he had done, but he strove to draw his stiff lips into a smile; but the effort hurt her almost more than the act had done.

"Forgive me," he said, almost stupidly. "It—it surprised me, that was all. I think—I think I had—forgotten."

He put up his hand and wiped the dampness from his brow.

She stood there leaning against a heavy table, looking at him without being aware that she was doing so.

The silence seemed to madden him.

"Olga," he cried out, hoarsely, "why don't you speak to me? Why do you stand there in that horrible silence? Reproach me, curse me, only speak!"

She put out her hand as if for aid, then laid her fingers for a moment across her burning eyes.

"There is nothing for which I could reproach or curse you, Neil," she said when she could force the tones out. I am the only one to censure. I deceived you, betrayed you into a marriage with me, and now I have no right to reproach or curse you when you shrink from me. It is only natural—so cruelly natural!"

"Don't! You hurt me so! But there! it is always of myself that I am thinking. I have been called generous and brave, and yet I am the most selfish man and the greatest coward alive! It is not of you that I have thought, but only of myself—always of myself!"

He groped his way to a chair and sat down wearily, then he motioned to her to come to him. He drew her down beside him when he felt her presence near, and a certain dark, passionate earnestness glowed in face and eyes.

"We were happy in those old days—you and I," he said, almost doggedly. "There was no ideal Heaven more blissful than that. We lived our dream in the land that we both loved, and we wanted for nothing beyond that. We longed for nothing different. Why not go back to those days again?"

"We cannot live upon memory, Neil," she said, with gentle resignation, "and we cannot reverse the wheels of time. We can wipe out nothing of the past, and we cannot force ourselves to forget."

"There is nothing to forget!" he cried, passionately, "there is no reason why we should forget! Let us go back there! We have wealth now, and living getting amounts to nothing. Let us wipe out these last few weeks from the calendar of our lives, and go back to the old life, Olga! We can be happy. We will be happy."

The voice was not like Neil's to her, nor the manner, nor the tone. It sounded almost like the madness of a thoroughly desperate man, and she did not quite comprehend. A sort of tumult filled her soul.

Was there not the happiness of which she had dreamed within her grasp? If he loved her sufficiently—if he but loved her sufficiently!

She dropped upon her knees there beside him, and looked at him eagerly.

"You think you could be happy?" she questioned eagerly. "You think you would learn not to regard me with loathing when that scar would be before your eyes every day of your whole future life?"

"But it need not be before my eyes. Why can we not be as we have been in the past?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you see? I have ceased to want my sight. I have ceased to desire to see."

She uttered a little cry—a cry of horror and amazement—then she rose suddenly and moved back from him, as if the contact with him had grown painful.

"No, no!" she gasped. "The thought is awful! Can you think that I would wilfully deprive you of your sight for the rest of your life, in order that I might retain your tolerance? Oh, we should grow to loathe each other! There would be no peace nor rest neither night nor day. I should become the horror of blindness to you, and the knowledge of what I had cost you would kill me. Why, it would grow into a spectre that would poison every moment of our lives, until we should die by our own hands, in order to escape it!"

"Then you will not accept?"

"No—and a thousand times, no! I have come here to stand beside you when the operation shall have been performed that will give you back your sight. I have come to nurse you back to health, and then—"

"And then, Olga—what?"

"It is all in the hands of Heaven. I shall abide by your will. If you can make good the sacrament of marriage with love, I am ready to be your wife. If your love can stand the test of sight, I shall be the happiest woman that the world holds. And, if not, then our separation must come."

He was silent for a moment, then he sighed deeply.

"Very well," he said, quietly. "It shall be as you wish. I have loved you, dear, and I shall get used to it by-and-by."

She observed, with cruel distinctness, that he used the past tense—"I have loved you!"—and a little smile curved her lips; but she was not aware that she had smiled.

The strangest sensation had crept over her. She thought that it was the ghastly bitterness that filled her soul that caused it. She had suffered so much that it seemed to her that further suffering was impossible. She had grown dulled and stupid under it, and the words did not hurt her as the drawing back had done when he touched the scar upon her cheek.

He put out his hand, and she put hers in it calmly. Of the two she was much the more self-possessed.

"At what hour to-morrow is the operation to be performed?" she asked.

"At ten in the morning."

"Then I am going to ask you to leave me now, in order that I may get some much needed rest."

He arose almost with relief. He took a step toward the door, then he stopped suddenly and put out his arms. His face crimsoned.

"Olga," he said, slowly, "shall I have to entreat my wife to grant me a good-night caress?"

A dull red glow passed over her face. For the first time she hesitated, then very slowly she went up to him and put up her cheek for him to kiss. He touched it lightly and left the room.

In that moment they both knew that their love-life was done for ever.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

MORGAN ADESON was standing at the end of the hall looking through a window, at what he knew not. He was not listening, and yet he turned suddenly, and a swift flush dyed his cheeks at the sound of the closing of the door as Neil left Olga's room.

He seemed to take in at a glance that Neil was alone, and he went forward quickly.

The moment had given him an opportunity to control himself, and his voice was almost natural as he said:

"Are you ready to return home?"

"Yes."

Stuart's voice trembled as he uttered the monosyllable, and there was that in it which seemed to tell its own story. Morgan glanced at him sharply, then he took his arm, and without seeming to direct his steps, he led him away. They both walked on in silence, which was not broken between them during the drive home. It was not until they were at the door that Stuart said:—

"Come in with me, old man, won't you? I am

more nervous than a woman. I feel as if I should go mad to be left alone to-night."

Adeson did not reply, but followed his friend into the house and up the stairs to Neil's room. He sat down beside the window and looked out, forgetting that he had lighted a cigar a little before and that it was going out.

Stuart's pacing up and down the floor annoyed him; but he said nothing, as he knew that he had often relieved his own feelings in that way, and yet it was a downright pleasure to him when Neil came to him and threw himself into a chair.

He looked into the white, drawn face of his old-time friend, and the strangest feeling that he ever remembered to have experienced shot through his heart.

"Adeson," Neil said, his voice cold and heavy under the restraint that he was putting upon himself, "I think that the hardest decision that ever came into a man's life rests with me this evening. Help me!"

Morgan started. His fingers closed suddenly over the cigar he held and broke it. He flung it through the window with greatest deliberation before replying.

"I can't," he said, dully. "No one can help you. It is a matter that concerns you and—you and your wife alone."

Neil winced.

"I know that you are right," he said, slowly.

"I know that I should not have asked it of you, and yet I hoped that you would say something, if only for the sake of argument, upon the subject. That always helps a man. But you are right, quite right. The highest and holiest thing in life is duty, and I must force myself to face it as bravely as I can. I never knew before what a coward I am, Adeson."

Morgan took another cigar from his pocket and lighted it, then with the smoke curling in blue volumes about his head, he said slowly,—

"It is not that, Stuart. You are not a coward. You have only made the mistake that so many men have made, and that men will go on making to the end of the chapter."

"What is that?"

"You have fancied yourself in love when you were not. You have allowed yourself to speak on a holy subject to a woman, when that feeling had never entered your heart, and you are just discovering it now."

"You are wrong! I swear you are wrong! I did love Olga!"

Morgan shook his head, and a curious smile curved his lips.

"No," he said softly, almost tenderly; "if you had ever loved her no blot upon the outer surface of her skin could ever change that love. You may have been fascinated with her voice, her sweetness of manner, her intellectuality, but you never loved her. That, Stuart, is the immortal part of us, that even dissolution has no power to annihilate."

"It is not true! It cannot be true! I lived only in the sound of her voice, was happy only in her presence. I thrilled beneath the touch of her hand, and responded to her mood as the organ does to the mood of a master musician."

"And yet to-night, in her presence, these emotions were all dead."

"No! Not dead! I forgot everything when I heard her speak. I loved her again as I had loved her down there in the sweet country home where I first grew to listen for the sound of her coming footsteps."

"Yet now—"

"And then," he continued solemnly, with a little piteous break in his voice, "and then I touched by chance the scar on her cheek. Do you remember what you said when you told me of it? You said: 'It is like a flame from hell!' Adeson, my hand was in that flame, and it seemed to burn straight into my soul."

"I was a mad fool to say such a thing to you!" cried Morgan, passionately, springing up and walking up and down the floor as he had condemned Neil, in his own mind, for doing but a few minutes previous. "I was a mad fool! I hated her then for the terrible wrong that she had done you in winning your love, and I hate her now. I hate her for the fearful trouble she has brought into your life. I hate her because—"

well, never mind all that. I may hate her, but that does not prevent my seeing another side to the question now, and I tell you there is much to Olga Bretherton—I mean Mrs. Stuart—besides the trifling beauty that she has lost. If you had ever loved her, you would love her more after you had seen her than you did before. But you never did, and you never will."

There was something so peculiar in the intonation of the last sentence that it seemed to impress even Morgan himself. It was almost as if he were resenting a personal affront. His face crimsoned as he realised it, but he made no apology nor comment. He threw himself down upon a couch and stretched his feet out, puffing the smoke about him savagely.

"I don't know," said Neil, at last, dreamily. "I don't seem to know anything. I don't seem to understand anything of my own sensations. There is but one thing that I comprehend perfectly."

"And that is—"

"My duty in that matter."

"There may be two ideas of that. What do you believe to be your duty?"

"Olga is my wife. There can be but one idea of that. 'What Heaven has joined' we have no right to sunder."

A dull, red glow burned in Morgan's cheeks.

"We are constantly laying at God's door some error that belongs solely to ourselves!" he cried, almost angrily. "God joins hearts, not hands, and I rather fancy He shakes the dust of the whole transaction off His feet when man takes upon himself to convert a sacrament into pollution."

"Morgan!"

"I entirely mean every word that I have uttered. No man has greater regard for the sacrament of marriage than I have, and no man has greater abhorrence of its pollution."

"Then what do you advise me to do? Can I ruin that girl's whole life because I am a fool and a dreamer?"

Morgan did not reply. A sullen silence had fallen over him. Neil waited for a time, and then continued, quietly:

"I don't exactly understand what it is that you wish me to do, old man. You are not in the least like yourself when you speak of Olga to me. This hatred of her is so unjust."

"It is worse than that; it is madness!" cried Morgan, passionately. And yet, in some strange way, it does not blind me to her real worth; it seems to make it all the plainer to me. Neil, tell me truly, do you believe that you loved her—before?"

"I do."

"Then perhaps I am wrong—all wrong. As you say, I don't seem in the least like myself in this. I don't understand myself at all. It may be that you really loved her, and this sensation that you have described to me may have, after all, been only the result of my exaggerated description of the curse upon her. Let your sight decide it. In a few days now you will know. You will grow accustomed to the thought of it during those days that she will be beside you; and then, when the time comes, let your heart speak—only, for pity's sake, don't insult her by offering her your body when your heart is not in it!"

There was another long silence, and then Morgan arose to a sitting posture. He leaned forward and placed his hand upon Neil's knee.

"I told you," he said, gently, "that the scar upon her cheek was such an one as a brave soldier receives in battle. Would you like me to tell you the story of it?"

Neil nodded.

Morgan arose and turned out the gas. A soft gleam from the street lamps stole into the room, distant and soothing. Neil's outline was shadowy.

And there in the darkness Morgan told the story—told it lingeringly, almost lovingly—not exactly as he had heard it from Olga's lips, because she had been too modest in its relation, but as he felt it to be—as he, in his heart, knew it to be.

When he had finished, he observed that there

were tears in the blind eyes of his friend and that his hand trembled.

He placed his hand upon the bowed head for a moment, then he said, in an altered tone,—

"Come, Stuart, you must go to bed. You will need all the strength you can get for to-morrow, and you must not squander it in this way. You will need double strength, old friend, for yourself and—for her."

## CHAPTER XXV.

It had been arranged by Morgan with Doctor Selby, that Olga was to be present the following day when the operation was performed, in the capacity of a nurse, after Morgan had convinced the old practitioner that her nerve would not fail, and it was he who went himself for her, it never occurring to him that he could have sent a carriage with much less inconvenience to himself and equally as much comfort to her.

She had been to breakfast, and was in her travelling-gown when he presented himself, and it was her hand that opened the door to admit him.

He found her pale, but perfectly calm, and without even a word of greeting, he said quietly,—

"I am glad that you are ready. Selby never likes to wait. The carriage is at the door. Come."

"It was very good of you to come for me!" she said, humbly.

"What else was there to do?" he asked, in surprise.

"I expected that you would simply send."

"Whom?"

"A carriage."

"Oh! would you have preferred it?"

"No. You know that I would not. You have a most unfortunate way of misunderstanding me."

"Never mind that. Come."

He drew her hand through his arm and led her to the carriage and lifted her in with greater care than he might have done a princess, and with as much kindness as he might have shown a child.

He gave the address to the coachman, and then seated himself beside her.

"I thought you might prefer not having Selby know anything of the relations between you and Stuart until after this is all over," he said to her, with just a trace of embarrassment in his manner, "and so you have been represented as a relative—which you are—and a nurse. You don't object, do you?"

"It was like your kindness and thoughtfulness," she said, gratefully.

He did not speak to her again until just before they reached the residence where the doctor and Neil awaited them, and then he turned to her and took her little cold fingers into his warm palm.

"I wish I could help you, Olga," he said to her, gently. "I wish there was something that I might do to make it easier for you."

Tears came into her eyes and her lips trembled.

"You have made it easier," she said brokenly.

"Do you think that your friendship is nothing to me—I who am so cruelly alone?"

"My friendship?"

There was a curious ring of wonderment in his tone. Had he not told Stuart only the night before that he hated her? Had he not told himself a thousand times a day that he loathed her, that he despised her? And yet, here she was speaking of his friendship for her as if it were an established fact and there could not be the remotest doubt of it!

He had not the courage—no, not the cruelty to deceive her; and yet he felt a sense of treachery steal over him that was horrible. He who had always been the most loyal of men, who believed that loyalty was the noblest thing in the character of a God, felt himself a Judas, betraying his friend, this lonely girl, and even himself!

And yet he did not understand it. And he was as sincere and honest in his misconception of his own emotions as it was possible for a man to be.

He dropped her hand and leaned back in the carriage, a hard, cold expression creeping into his countenance. He sat there until the carriage had stopped, then, as he took her from it, he said almost brutally,—

"You are entirely wrong, Mrs. Stuart. I have never given you my friendship, and I have none to give."

She looked at him for a moment, startled, alarmed; and then she smiled.

"You can never make me believe that," she said, softly, "after those days at Ashleigh."

He started and flushed guiltily. His eyes darkened as if with pain. She saw it all, but did not comprehend, and before there was an opportunity for any explanation whatever, the door opened and they were admitted by the servant who was awaiting them.

"Dr. Selby is upstairs with Mr. Stuart," he explained. "I was told to take you to them at once."

Morgan did not speak, but motioned the man to lead the way, and he followed with Olga. He did not offer to assist her, and she never glanced at him. He even thought that she had forgotten his existence, when the servant opened the door and ushered them into the presence of Neil, Dr. Selby, and his assistant.

She went up to Neil, and laid her hand in his as naturally as if she had indeed been simply the relative they had represented her.

"Heaven bless you," she said below her breath, "and give you strength to come out of it all successfully!"

He pressed her hand and smiled, without replying, and then Morgan presented her as Miss Bretherton to Selby and his assistant.

The old doctor looked at her curiously, attracted by the scar upon her cheek. He made no effort to conceal the fact of his interest in it, but almost as soon as he had pronounced her name in reply to the introduction, he walked up to her and ran his fingers down it thoughtfully. He even drew the collar of her gown down a little way and looked at the mark upon her throat.

She coloured a little, but she neither shrunk from him nor repulsed him. Somehow it seemed so much better to her that he should do that than to see the old expression of horror upon his countenance. It seemed, in some intangible way, to establish a sort of friendship between them.

But, strangely enough, it seemed to anger Morgan, and he exclaimed, almost curtly,—

"Are you ready to go on, doctor?"

Selby appeared not to have heard.

"How did you get that scar, Miss Bretherton?" he asked. "I mean what acid burned it? Vitriol?"

"Yes."

"H'm! Whoever threw it meant that it should do its work well. And a bungling doctor dressed the wound. That's bad—very bad! You should sue that man for malpractice."

"No jury's verdict could fill that awful place with flesh," she answered, solemnly; "and anything else would seem worse than the birthright for pottage, would it not?"

"Perhaps you are right; for, after all, you have your life, and that is much. It so easily might have been death, for here it is burned so deep that the jugular vein has just escaped. I think that it was more luck than skill. Well, well! I was half afraid to trust you before, but I'm not now. Are you ready, Stuart?"

He turned away from her in the most business-like way in the world, and then, with the operation upon three blind eyes before him, he turned and looked at her again, drawing the collar even further away than he had done before.

"H'm!" he muttered, thoughtfully, then went back to Neil again.

Morgan's face was like a thunder-cloud, but he made no comment.

"If she makes no objection to such unwarranted impertinence, why should I?" he said, mentally.

He stood leaning against the window-casing, watching earnestly when the preparation for the operation was going on, and observed, with curious interest, that Dr. Selby required the assistance of Olga even more often than he did that of the man whom he had brought for the purpose; and he observed, also, how well she executed the orders that he gave.



She seemed to shrink from nothing that was necessary to be done, and yet she did it all so tenderly, and in a way that so perfectly became a woman, that he did not even object when Dr. Selby took her hand when the operation was all over and the bandage had been placed over the eyes.

"You have done nobly!" the old practitioner exclaimed, "and I congratulate you. One might almost think you had been accustomed to being a doctor's assistant all your life. If ever you want to earn your living in a noble cause, come to me and I will give you all the work that you can do. Remember, the patient must not be left unguarded for a single moment; for if that bandage should slip, the operation would be without avail. You will undertake to see that it is done?"

"I will see that it is done."

"Then Stuart will owe his sight as much or more to you than he will to me."

He observed the flush upon her cheeks, the sparkle that came to her eyes, and smiled indulgently.

Morgan followed him from the room.

"You think there is no doubt but that the operation will prove a success?" he asked.

"No; there is no doubt," Selby answered. "There is danger of his taking cold, or of the moving of the bandage, that is all. But, I say, where did you find that remarkable woman? I would have given a great deal to try an experiment at skin grafting upon her."

Morgan's face grew white as death. He looked at the doctor breathlessly for a moment, then he said, hoarsely,—

"Skin-grafting?"

"Yes."

"You think you could remove that scar?"

There was something sultry and hoarse in the tone, and the physician answered, with a peculiar intonation,—

"Not without killing her."

He went out quickly after that, and as he took his seat in his carriage, his assistant said to him:

"Do you believe that what you said to Mr. Adeson about Miss Bretherton is true?"

"No; but he is in love with her, and I don't believe in raising false hopes. There would not be one chance in twenty for her life."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

DAYS that were filled with occupation for Olga, and yet the dearest days that she ever remembered to have passed, followed.

There were two professional nurses to attend to the real work of the sick-room, one for day-work and the other for night, but it was from Olga that Doctor Selby exacted his reports; it was Olga whom he held responsible for everything; and between the two there grew up in those days a friendship that was rarely pleasant to the almost friendless girl.

A fever had followed the operation that had been performed, a fever that caused Selby to look rather serious when the thermometer was taken from beneath the patient's tongue, and so Olga scarcely left her charge at all. She was there day and night until Morgan told the doctor, with more severity than Selby had ever heard him use before, that unless he commanded Miss Bretherton to sleep more than she was doing, there would be another patient upon his hands.

And so she was banished from the sick-room during certain hours of the night, but the anxiety lest all should not be well would not let her sleep; and then the bed would become hateful to her, and she would wander from place to place trying to discover something that would induce repose.

She had thrown a dressing-gown over her night-dress one evening, and was roaming about in the same vain endeavour, when the unusual sight of the moon streaming into the window attracted her. She paused beside the window and lifted her eyes, unconscious, as she always

was, of the beautiful picture that she was making, when suddenly she realised that she was not alone. She glanced up, not at all startled, and saw Morgan standing there beside her.

"Is this the way you sleep?" he asked, quietly.

"I couldn't," she explained. "I tried; but it was horrible to lie there awake, staring up at the ceiling during all those endless hours. It is much better here. Is it not beautiful?"

She was looking up at the moon again, and his eyes rested upon her face. The scar was turned from him.

"Yes," he answered, hesitatingly. "Do you know what it reminds me of?"

"No."

"Have you forgotten the night upon the balcony down there in the country where I—where you met—Neil?"

"I remember."

"It was a night like this. You were standing beside your window looking up at the moon as you are looking now, and I was down upon the lawn."

"And you climbed up the lattice-work and sat on the balcony. I can see you now as you looked sitting there in the moonlight, with the cigar between your lips."

She smiled slightly, and he flushed a little.

"It is singular," he said, slowly, almost as if he were speaking to himself, "how well I remember every little incident of that night. It seems to me that I have retained mental pictures of every movement of your hand, of every turn of your head, and— But I am talking like an idiot! How was your husband when you left him?"

He spoke the words "your husband" almost savagely, and Olga looked up at him with a little expression of pain in her eyes.

"That sounds like a sacrilege," she said, softly.

"But it is true, is it not?" he inquired, almost brutally.

"In name alone," she answered, scarcely conscious of the words she spoke.

He turned upon her fiercely and compelled her eyes to meet his. He looked at her for a full minute before he allowed his lips to frame the question that seemed to be forcing itself from between them. His voice was so hoarse that it frightened her.

"Is that true?" he demanded rather than asked. "Will you swear to me that this is true?"

He was breathing heavily, and he held her wrists so that he hurt her; but she neither winced nor shrunk from him.

"Yes; it is true," she whispered.

And then slowly his fingers loosened from her wrists, a cold perspiration came upon his brow, and he fell back against the window-sill for support, as if his entire strength had deserted him.

She looked at him, fascinated. While his hand no longer touched her she still felt the cold steel of his fingers upon her wrist. It seemed to her that she could not have removed her eyes from his if her life had depended upon it.

And then the silence became maddening. She could think of nothing to say, and it seemed to her that she would not have dared to speak, even if she could.

He put his hand up to his eyes, and pressed it there for a moment, then took it down, and stood erect once more.

"Go to bed," he said, almost roughly. "You will be ill to-morrow."

She leaned her head against the cold glass and looked out.

"No," she said, quietly; "I shall not. And even if I were, what matters it?"

"Stuart would die," he answered, hoarsely. "You know that to-morrow Selby has said that the bandage shall be removed. To-morrow Stuart will see."

He was not prepared to see her turn so white. She tottered and would have fallen but that he caught her in his arms. There was no chair near

them, and he was forced through common humanity to hold her in his arms.

He felt the hot blood surge through his veins as he had seen the billows roll upon the shore at Ashleigh, only that was cold and damp, while this was hot as fire; and his heart beat until it seemed to him that his whole body was throbbing under the influence.

She did not faint, but after a moment of inactivity she lifted herself. He apparently forgot that his arm was still about her, for he did not remove it. His lips were close to the yellow coils of her beautiful hair, but she was not aware of it.

She had forgotten Morgan, and had gone back in thought to Neil.

"To-morrow!" she said, brokenly. "How shall I bear it?"

"Bear what?" he whispered.

"For him to see the truth. For him to look upon the awful thing that has made my life a burden and existence a curse! How can I bear his loathing?"

Morgan, without realising it, drew her closer. His hot breath was upon her cheek. She felt the throb of his heart against her.

"Loathing!" he cried, passionately. "If he ever loved you, he will worship you for the suffering that you have known and borne so bravely. If he ever loved you, he will feel that the scar upon your cheek sanctifies your womanhood! If he is not a fool—a knave—he will fall at your feet as the heathen does at the feet of his idol. What is your flesh to the man who loves your soul? And what could the man be to you who loved your body alone?"

She turned to him swiftly. She caught his hand, and his arm tightened about her shoulders. The scar was there, standing out in the moonlight as a flame does against the darkness of the night.

"You think that he will not despise me?" she whispered.

There was an expression in her eyes which he could not fathom—did not try to fathom. He had forgotten Neil Stuart—forgotten him as completely as if he had never existed, and while she referred to him as "he," it was not the face with the blind eyes that was before her heart. It was the blonde hair, the blue eyes, the heavenly face of Morgan Adeson that was before her, and the passion that she saw was reflected from his eyes.

He was looking at the scar—looking hungrily, yearningly, and without considering his act, without knowing what influence moved him, without knowing what it was that he did, he bent his head and pressed his lips upon it, just at the deepest part, where the throat and cheek unite; then, with his lips still upon it, he whispered,—

"I don't know what I think. I don't know what I do. But I know that I am the greatest scoundrel on all the earth!"

He had fallen back before the last sentence was spoken. His arms fell beside him as if under paralysis. His face was ghastly in its whiteness, his eyes strained and bloodshot.

He was behind the shelter of the lace drapery at the window, hidden from view, and it seemed to him the greatest relief that he had ever known in his life when a calm voice from the doorway said,—

"Miss Bretherton, will you come upstairs, please? Dr. Selby is here, and when I told him that you were not asleep, he said that he would like to see you for a moment."

Olga did not reply. She did not glance in Morgan's direction, but turned and followed the nurse from the room.

He groped his way out when he had been left alone, and found a chair. He flung himself into it, and leaning far back, he covered his face with his hands passionately, desperately.

"I told Stuart that I hated her," he groaned. "And I believed that I spoke the truth. I believed that I did hate her. Hate her! I—"

He did not seem to be capable of completing the sentence, but springing up, he went quickly into the hall, took his hat from the rack, and rushed out into the night.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

As one in a dream, Olga followed the girl who had come to summon her to the presence of the physician.

She answered his questions, but never could recall afterward what it was that he had said to her. Her brain seemed dazed, and the only feeling that crept into her understanding was when he said to her,—

"You should have been in bed hours ago. Go at once. I will not have my authority set at naught in this fashion. Stuart is all right, and safe enough. Go, and don't show yourself here again until I send for you."

She smiled faintly, murmured a word of thanks, which he scarcely heard, and then slipped away to her own room.

For the first time she locked the door, then leaned against it with closed eyes, her hand pressed above her heart for some moments before she could summon strength to light the gas. When she had done it, she sat down upon the edge of a chair, weak and faint, yet sitting upright, almost rigid.

She did not know what was the matter with her. She no more understood her condition than a baby understands the cause of its pain.

She sat there for some time, dazed and bewildered, then she put out her hand slowly. It fell upon a hand-mirror that lay face downward upon the dressing table. Her fingers closed about it half unconsciously, and almost without knowing what she did, she lifted it, and for the first time in weeks she looked at her reflected face.

The eyes did not meet her own. It was not, indeed, at herself that she looked at all, but at the scar where the throat and cheek joined. She looked at it long, intently, and then slowly passed her fingers over the place that his lips had touched.

And then an expression crept into her eyes that was almost like a smile. She pressed her hand upon the spot softly, gently, as if there was something sacred connected with it. For the first time since that awful mark had appeared upon her flesh she did not feel that shrinking from herself that she had felt before.

And then the memory of that remark that he made to her under the trees, on that first day of his arrival came back to her.

"If he should see you he would despise you."

She put down the glass suddenly, then arose and turned off the gas. She walked to the window and sat down. The night air was chill, but she did not appear to feel it. The heat in her veins warmed her. If her life had depended upon it, she could not have told of what she was thinking, and yet her fingers touched the scar with a kind of caressing movement. She was recalled to herself when the cathedral clock chimed the hour of three, and she arose with a curious little smile and shook herself.

"What am I doing?" she said, half aloud. "The doctor said that I was to get some sleep. I wonder what he would think if I were to tell him that I obeyed him by sitting at a back window, where I could not even see the moon until three o'clock in the morning. I must sleep, for I shall need my strength to-morrow. The terrible test of my life will come then, for Neil will see!"

On former occasions a shudder had passed over her as she remembered that fact. He had been the one person in all the world that she could face without fear, and the knowledge that that would be taken from her was almost worse than death to her. Yet now, strangely enough, she smiled to herself there in the darkness as she remembered that on the morrow her husband would look for the first time upon the scar that disfigured her.

She mechanically removed the dressing-gown that covered her night-dress, and got into bed. Still she lay there with that shadowy smile upon her lips, and did not sleep. Her hand rested beneath her cheek, the side upon which was the scar.

She was not restless or unhappy. She lay there quietly with her eyes closed, and after a time she must have fallen asleep, for it seemed

to her but a moment when there was a knock upon her door.

She sprang out of bed and opened it.

"What is it?" she asked, anxiously. "Has anything happened?"

"Oh, no," the nurse answered. "The doctor sent me to call you, that is all."

"Why, you don't mean—"

"That it is after nine o'clock," replied the woman, with a smile.

For the first time the nurse heard a soft, musical laugh from the lips that were so unaccustomed to it.

"I had no idea it was so late," she exclaimed. "Tell the doctor that I will be with him in five minutes."

She closed the door and dressed herself hastily, then entered Neil's room quietly.

Morgan was there. She knew that the moment that she entered, but yet had never glanced in his direction. She felt the crimson flashing from brow to throat, and paused beside the doctor before going to Neil's side.

"Good morning," she exclaimed, striving to speak naturally, but not succeeding at all. "You see I have obeyed you this time to the letter. I have had a good sleep."

"And you look a hundred per cent. better for it," he replied, pressing her hand with friendly warmth. "Why, you are as blooming as a rose."

"And our patient, how is he?" she asked.

"Getting along admirably."

Neil sat in a chair in a darkened corner, and she went to him swiftly, as if she feared her courage would fail her. She touched his hand almost timidly.

"It will all be over in a few moments now," she said, a little wistfully.

"Yes," he said, with a smile. "I shall know the colour of your eyes in less than half-an-hour, Olga."

Her colour deepened. She could think of nothing to say in reply, and he pressed her hand gently. He had not meant to say that exactly, because he knew that it would remind her painfully of the blot upon her beauty, and he regretted it. In order to change the subject, he said,—

"There is Morgan. You have not said good-morning to him yet."

She forced herself to lift her eyes.

He was standing at the end of the mantel-shelf, his elbow leaning upon it, looking at her. His face was grey and cold, and about the blue eyes were dark circles, and yet he had rarely looked more singularly handsome than he did at that moment. Her eyes dropped, and a darker crimson crept over her brow.

"Good morning, Mr. Adeson," she compelled her lips to say. "I did not see you."

She had spoken the truth in so far as words were concerned, for she had not seen him; but she knew that he was there as well as if her eyes had never wandered from his own.

"Good-morning, Miss Bretherton," he said, almost coldly, without altering his position at all.

Dr. Selby glanced curiously from one to the other, then a little inscrutable smile twitched in the corners of his mouth. He saw that Olga was greatly embarrassed, and wishing to come to her relief, he exclaimed, briskly,—

"Come, now! There is no use in keeping Stuart in suspense any longer. Let us see the result of my skill and of Miss Bretherton's care."

Morgan started.

"I will go," he said, stammering a trifle. "I will come again by and by, Stuart, and—"

"No, no!" cried Neil, eagerly. "Don't do that! don't do it, old man! You are the best friend I have in the world, and upon whose face should my eyes rest first after Olga's except your's?"

Dr. Selby looked puzzled. He glanced quickly at Morgan, and saw the ashen face grow to a dull red. He went up and placed his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

"I shall need you," he said, softly.

Somehow Morgan understood that it was not

true; but he went up to Neil and wrung his hand, as if there were something more than friendship in it—a matter of an aroused conscience, perhaps.

"I shall not go," he said, with something like emotion in his tone. "You may always count upon me, old man, for I love you better than I love myself."

The words, the tone, seemed to get into Olga's soul. She felt the tears rise in her eyes, and one rolled slowly down her cheek.

No one spoke for a moment, and then Neil smiled a trifle unsteadily.

"I suppose I ought to feel like the bird that is fluttering at the door of an open cage," he said, quietly; "but somehow I don't. Perhaps it is because I have grown to be a coward, and am afraid the operation will not prove a success."

If he had told the truth he would very likely have changed his sentence, and said, "I am afraid the operation will prove a success," for it was that indeed which affected him so strangely. The unacknowledged feeling was at work in his heart; but he put it from him and turned to the doctor.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "Go on, please!"

Olga was upon one side of him, holding his hand and kneeling upon the floor. Morgan stood upon the other, one hand holding Neil's the other resting upon his shoulder. Neil's face was turned toward Olga.

The light was shadowy, but all were clearly visible as the physician took his position.

(To be continued.)

## HOW BEAUTY SETTLED MATTERS.

—10:—

"If John Robertson has been kind enough to give his consent for my son to marry his daughter," observed Mr. Townley, with sarcastic slowness, "I haven't given mine, not by a long sight!"

"But, father," deprecated Dick Townley, his bronzed face deeply flushed, and an expression, half pleading, half dismayed, in his usual merry blue eyes, "you know that I couldn't very well ask your consent till I knew what Meg would say, and I only found that out last night. I thought you'd be awfully pleased about this. You know you've always liked Meg and her mother, and I've heard you say half a dozen times you wished you had a daughter just like her."

"Meg Robertson," said his father, magisterially "is one person; her father is quite another. She's a church member, and a right sweet girl, too; but he's a horse-racer and a better, which, to my mind, is next door to a thief. Why, the very reason he's worked so hard for the Fair this year, is so he could have races at it. It would be a countenancing of evil to let my son marry into such a family. It would be putting of myself on a level with a man like John Robertson."

"You could be on a level with worse persons!" returned Dick, with indignation, pardonable in a young man who had been trying to keep his patience during a half-hour's lecture against his sweetheart and her father.

"Robertson is honest and kind and a friendly neighbour, and his word is known to be as good as his bond, if he doesn't think just as we do about some things. You might be as liberal as he is, father. He never thought of objecting to me because you and he are always disagreeing about politics and almost everything else you do."

"Liberal," groaned Mr. Townley. "Well, if I was such a man as John Robertson is, I could afford to be liberal, as you call it. Look here, Dick, my word's known to be as good as my bond, too, and I give you my word that whenever you catch me horse-racing, I'll let you marry Meg Robertson soon as ever you and she likes! But till then I never shall! And I reckon you may just as well mark it down that that means never, anyhow!"



Mr. Townley dropped the riding-whip with which he had been gesticulating into its socket with an emphasising rattle, and stalked off to the house through the golden September morning, leaving his son to put up Beauty, the horse they had driven from the fair grounds, where they had taken some last choice exhibits.

Beauty rubbed her warm, velvety muzzle against Dick's shoulder as he stood wretchedly pondering, and peered into his face with loving, half-human eyes, as if inquiring the reason of his evident dejection.

The young fellow suddenly flung his arm around the horse's neck and hid his face from the sunshine in her scanty yellow mane. Even her sympathy touched him sharply just then.

He was by much the youngest son, and had always been his father's favourite. The prospect of long dissension between them was keen pain to him.

His brothers were both married and settled on farms of their own, and he and his father remained alone in the large, comfortable homestead which the old man wished him never to leave.

In how many air-castles he had seen Meg ruling there with her dainty, womanly ways, making it a real home for them all!

And how was he to tell her of his father's decision? She was gentle, but she was proud, too, and so were her father and mother. None of them would ever wish her to enter a family the head of which would not accept her. Even though Dick might defy his father, he knew Meg would never marry him without his consent.

A man's few, slow, bitter tears, wet Beauty's mane. That sagacious quadrupled looked earnestly at her young master, and was plainly filled with fond anxiety over his unaccountable behaviour, till he roused himself to unharness her.

Beauty by no means deserved her title, but her steadiness and intelligence made her a general favourite. She was affable with all, but to Dick she gave an absolute devotion, and she had good reason for it.

Two years before, she had been passing Townley's farm, a wretched animal, harnessed alone to a "mover's" wagon, which was slowly making for a neighbouring village.

That its progress was slow was due to no lack of oaths or lashes expended on Beauty, in spite of her honest efforts to do her best. The harness had made cruel galls upon her gaunt, whip-marked body; her every rib might have been counted by the anatomically interested; in her great, hollow eyes was that look of resigned despair which seems to cry to heaven for judgment for the brutes against more brutal men.

Near the Townleys' gate she fell in the attempt to drag her load up a deep-rutted hill, after an exhausting pull through the muddy hollow below.

From the whip-lash her owner appealed to his whip-stock; but neither of these encouragements, nor even the kicks of his heavy boots in her lean sides availed with Beauty to rise and continue her weary march.

Dick Townley chanced to ride up on his sleek roadster just as it seemed likely that Beauty's career would be finished then and there, and bought her out of pity.

"She was a good horse once, sir," observed her owner, as some excuse for the price he exacted—which was based more on Dick's too-evident wrath and sympathy than on Beauty's market value.

"The worst of it is there's nothing to prevent the brutal man's buying another luckless beast to abuse," lamented Dick, when he had with difficulty coaxed and lifted his purchase to her feet, after freeing her from her harness, and led her tottering steps to a hospitable barn, amid the jeering comments of several farmhands. "But at least this poor thing shall die in peace," he assured himself.

Contrary to all expectations, however, Beauty did not die.

Finding her likely to live, Dick took counsel with kind-hearted John Robertson, the learned in horse-flesh, and as the result of much care,

Beauty presently became a very useful and highly respectable animal.

Plump no feeding ever made her, and ungainly she always would be, with her long legs and big hoofs and rough coat of faded sorrel; but she was so willing and faithful and friendly, so perfectly to be trusted to the driving of the most timid child or woman, and could so easily shake a very satisfactory speed out of her awkward self on occasion, that Dick had more than one good offer for her.

But he refused to sell. He felt he could never forget that it was in consulting over Beauty's case that he had first learned to know John Robertson well, and that the delicate little touch of ice in Meg's manner toward him had melted, never to return, while her father laughingly recited what he called Dick's rescue of a golden-haired damsel in distress.

Meg's manner toward men was apt to have that touch of ice in it. Her father's position among the better class of the somewhat old-fashioned farmers, who had brought their strict notions with them, was not the most comfortable, and she resented it for him in her quiet way.

He himself was an easy-going personage, whose jollity might have degenerated into recklessness but for Meg and her mother.

He saw no more harm in raising and training racers than in raising corn, and if this did not happen to suit his neighbours, then he could very well dispense with their society.

But his pretty, gentle wife, and their still prettier daughter, must have whatever they wanted, and as that chance to be church-going, and the best of such society as there was in the neighbourhood, Mr. Robertson did all in his power to give these to them, as cheerfully as he would have bought them jewelled riding-whips and diamond horse-shoes, had their tastes lain chiefly in that direction.

In the same way, he had welcomed Dick as a son-in-law-elect, entirely overlooking long years of sparring with his father.

If Meg were suited and her mother approved, all was well, and would have been even had he disliked Dick as much as he liked him.

But, as Dick had foreboded, his father's disapproval put quite another face on his affairs.

When he told Meg that same evening, she took the ground he had feared, and refused even to consider herself engaged without his father's consent.

"Though, of course, she couldn't help loving him always, and could never marry any one else," she owned, as some small consolation.

Her mother declared Meg was right, and her father, though he swore vigorously in private over Mr. Townley's unreasonableness, agreed with them both, as usual.

Hence Dick's heart was heavy, gaily though his black roadster cantered, as he set out for the country fair on its third and last afternoon. His father went also, but separately, erect in his trap, driving meek, awkward-looking Beauty, at a decorous jog-trot.

This was the afternoon set for the crowning race, at which every locally noted horse of that and several adjacent villages was to appear; but it is almost needless to state that Mr. Townley had no intention of attending it.

Meg Robertson was there, of course, with her mother, and looked even prettier than usual in dull gold satin trimmed with black velvet and lace.

Under the wide brim of her picturesque black and gold hat her dark eyes shone softly brilliant; her cheeks rivalled the warm rose colour of the geraniums on her breast.

Mr. Townley felt a twinge of admiration, liking, almost remorse, as he looked up at her bright, innocent face in driving past; but his obstinate iron-grey eyebrows knit when he discovered the cause of her radiance in his own son seated near her.

For although they were not engaged, Miss Meg Robertson, of course, could not prevent Mr. Richard Townley from also occupying a seat in so public a place.

In his preoccupation, Mr. Townley became entangled in a drifting crowd of vehicles and

pedestrians, and was presently horrified to find himself close to the unfenced race-track at the very moment when the horses were assembling.

The racers, lean, shining, sinewy, frothed at their posts awaiting the start.

Beauty poked along, ears and tail down, more mild and quiet-looking even than usual.

Suddenly the signal came, the racers started into instant speed, and a great shout swept up from the crowd.

Beauty started also. With one wild dash she was on the track, several yards behind the hindmost trotter, but speeding, too.

The bit was in her teeth, her sensitive ears were pricked alert, her eyes were balls of fire. Women screamed and men shouted.

"A runaway—a runaway!"

It was not that at all. Beauty knew perfectly well what she was doing. The stimulus of past training, the excitement of conflict, of remembered victories, fired her veins.

Never breaking her magnificent gait, managing her big hoofs and long, ungainly limbs with easy strength, with the trap at her heels she gained on the light trotters harnessed to light racing sulkies.

Vainly Mr. Townley tugged at the reins; vainly he cried,—

"Whoa—whoa now, old girl!"

The once obedient horse heeded him not.

The crowd had realised the situation before he did, seeing that he was in no danger, and only cheered and laughed as he passed.

His highly-respectable hat had blown off; his grey hair stood on end; his long grey beard parted and streamed back over his shoulders with the wind of his flight. He caught a flashing glimpse of Dick's face and Meg's as he sped past the grand stand on the beginning of his second lap.

Beauty was finding her speed. Even those who had cheered her ironically had not dreamed she could do anything in such a race; but mad with excitement, she steadily overhauled the racers driven with whip and word.

She was up with the last of them. One by one the prizes of their counties fell behind her far-stretching stride.

She snuffed the dust and redoubled her efforts.

Mr. Townley had long since abandoned his. Pale and resigned, he sat back in the trap, holding the almost useless reins, and wondering what on earth was going to happen next.

The winning horse made a desperate spurt, under his jockey's lash. Ambition nerved Beauty to the contest.

The final goal was near, but stride by stride she was gaining on the winning horse. Her white nose was even with his sulky; then he stole slowly up along his steaming sides.

Neck and neck they strained for a moment. Then, with one last great effort, Beauty forged ahead, and while cheers rent the air, she passed the goal and won by a length.

Then she stopped of herself, and, patient and affable as ever, though she was panting, trembling and wet as though she had swam a river, she looked mildly around for some one to take care of her.

Plenty of hands were ready to pay her all necessary attentions, though Mr. Townley sat nervelessly still till he saw Dick pressing toward him through the crowd, when he descended carefully from his seat, with evident relief at finding himself safe on solid ground.

One of the horsemen who had been handling Beauty, started up with a sudden exclamation; then made a careful examination of her marks.

"I know her—I thought I knew her all along! There never was but one horse that could look so good-for-nothing and go as she does though," critically, "she's so out of training she couldn't have got away with any but these country jays. She's Sam Thompson's old Blondine. How on earth does she come to belong to a country farmer!"

Some one told him the story of Beauty's purchase, and he patted her pityingly.

"Poor Blondine! what a come-down you had of it! 'Twas enough to make Sam haunt your

brute of a master, if he didn't want to on his own account."

"You see," he added, explainingly, "Sam Thompson trained the mare from a colt and petted her like a baby. He never laid the weight of a lash on her, but she'd 'a gone till she dropped just to please him. He said that was the way to make a horse smart and gentle, and it certainly worked with her. She could do just anything but talk. And she was a daisy to go, just!"

"Sam'd strike a race-meeting or a fair with her, and everybody'd be crazy to bet against her, and then she'd let herself out and win, and he'd rake in the cash. But he took a partner one day, and then he died sudden, but before they found out foul play, the partner vamoosed with Blondine, and everything else he could lay his hands on."

"I can see it mighty clear. The scamp didn't dare race Blondine for fear of getting caught by somebody knowing her, and so he worked her to death himself, or sold her cheap on her looks."

Meantime John Robertson had approached the crest-fallen farmer. His hand was cordially extended, his handsome, ruddy face beamed jovially.

He might be proud for Meg, even more than himself, but he was not made to resist the chance of a joke on any one.

"So glad you've come round, Mr. Townley," said he. "But how much trouble you did take! Actually entering Beauty in a race to show Dick he could have his own way, as you told him he could whenever he caught you horse-racing, instead of just saying 'yes' quietly. But you are paid for it! The boys and I've been talking it over, and we're all agreed that though you didn't enter Beauty quite the usual way, yet as the race was free for all, and she won it hand-capped, too, the first purse is fairly yours."

The poor farmer gasped, as gasps a man under a shower-bath. Then he looked at Dick—then he rose to the occasion.

As pleasantly and easily as John Robertson had spoken he replied, following Robertson's lead in keeping Meg's name out of public use.

"I am much obliged to you and the gentlemen of your committee for your decision, though as all who saw me start can witness, I had no intention of entering Beauty for the race. But one can always make good use of money if one chooses, and I shall be happy to have the premium you offer for the fastest trotter sent to a deserving family I know who have had much sickness, and are in want. As for Dick, I shall keep my word to him."

Thus the expectant sporting men about lost their laugh at dignified Mr. Townley's expense. John Robertson himself looked as much at a loss as he had meant the farmer should yet a gleam of pleasure irradiated his gloom even before he overheard a low-toned colloquy between Dick and his father as they turned away.

"Oh, father, I don't want you to receive Meg when you don't want her, just because you gave your word and got caught! It's not worthy of her."

"I do want her now. I think I did all the time though I wouldn't let myself give in till Robertson caught me. He's not so bad, either, according to his lights. I'm meditatively—really feel grateful to Beauty, now it's all over. But, with stern decision—"I'll never drive her near another fair!"

The hottest region on the earth's surface is, from all accounts, to be found on the south-western coast of Persia, on the borders of the Persian Gulf. For forty consecutive days in the months of July and August the mercury has been known to stand above one hundred degrees in the shade night and day, and to run up as high as one hundred and thirty degrees in the middle of the afternoon. In Bahrain Island, which is situated in the centre of the most torrid part of this most torrid belt, as though it were nature's intention to make the place as unbearable as possible, water is something unknown. Great shafts have been sunk to the depth of 500 feet in the endeavour to find wells, but always with the same result—no water.

## FACETIÆ.

THE hen is not a cheerful bird. She broods a great deal.

TOM (desperately): "Can you return my love?" Fanny: "Any time."

SOMETHING a weak man can break more readily than a strong man—a promise.

"WHY do they call one-house villages hamlets?" "Because they are so melancholy."

YABSLEY: "Well, what's the latest in the racing line?" Mudge: "The horse I bet on, usually."

HE: "What makes this room so infernally hot?" She: "I have just been burning up your old love-letters, dear."

FILKINS (at 3 a.m.): "If your wife is such a jewel, why don't you go home!" Gallon: "M'fren, she-she's a cat's eye!"

READER: "Among the ancient Romans every public dinner opened with a ballet." Headem: "Ah, I see. Grace before meat."

HE: "Do you think Miss Plainer's photographs do her justice?" She: "Oh, yes; justice tempered with mercy."

JINKS: "Phew! Looks like rain." Winks: "We're going to have a thunder-shower." Jinks: "Guess that's so. Lend me one of my umbrellas, will you?"

"SIR, this is an insult!" exclaimed the alderman who had been offered £500 to get a boy into Christ's Hospital. "That's all right," replied the other. "Pocket the insult."

ANNE: "Do you know, Mabel, I had two offers of marriage last week." Mabel: "My darling Anne! I am so delighted. Then it is really true that your uncle has left you all his money?"

"WHAT'S the matter?" asked one of Willie Washington's friends. "You look uncomfortable." "I am," he replied. "I have just been wun o'vay by Miss Belle Pepperton's twain of thought."

FATHER: "Everything I say to you goes in at one ear and out at the other. Little Son (thoughtfully): "Is that what little boys has two ears for, papa?"

"DID you have a heavy rainfall yesterday?" "No; only enough to wet the just." "What about the unjust?" "Oh, they had borrowed all the umbrellas."

MAGISTRATE (to prisoner): "Have you any remarks to make?" Prisoner (a barber): "Yes, your worship. Your hair wants cutting." Magistrate: "So does yours. Three months."

MRS. LOTOS: "Poor Mrs. Lovers is ill, and I must go and see her. Mr. Lotos: "An errand of mercy, eh?" Mrs. Lotos: "Partly; and then I want to see how she looks with her hair down."

"HARRY TUCKER is the worst boy in school, Tommy, and I want you to keep as far from him as possible." Tommy: "I do, ma. He stays at the head of our classes all the time."

UNCLE JACK: "Have you a collection of any kind?" Bobby: "No, uncle; but I'm going to collect threepenny-bits as soon as I can get any to start with."

CHOLLIE: "Are you fond of the water?" Elsie: "Exceedingly! At the mere thought of sailing over the bounding waves I can scarcely contain myself." Chollie: "That's the way it affects me too."

"LOOK here, Mr. Truck," said Snooper; "those cabbage-seeds I got of you didn't come up." "It's just as well they didn't," replied the seedsman. "I've since ascertained that they weren't cabbage-seeds."

"THIS half-crown doesn't sound right," said the smart clerk, ringing the half-crown on his counter. "Humph!" said his coarse customer. "What do you want for half-crown, anyway? An operatic solo with orchestra accompaniment!"

"THE man I wed must be handsome, brave and noble; he must have no bad habits, and love me devotedly." "But, my dear, that is impossible, you know, quite impossible." "Why?" "Because there is only one such man in all the wide world, and he is going to marry me."

"THERE'S one curious thing about discovering places," said Johnny, after he had got through with his study. "Take Bermuda, for instance. It was discovered by a man named Bermudez. How he happen to stumble on a place with a name just like his, beats me."

IN DUBLIN—"I understand that Terrence McGinnis is worrukin' agin," said Mrs. Dolan to her next door neighbour. "Yer don't mane it! It wor on'y last week that he were appinted on the p'leece force. I wondher phy they discharged 'im?"

WINKS: "In every generation the age for marriage gets later. Our grandmothers married at sixteen, but our daughters do not marry until twenty-five or thirty." Jinks: "Well, that's all right. In the course of time people will put off marriage until too old to marry at all, and then the millennium will begin."

SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT: "You say the boy is noted for his untruthfulness. Have you tried all legitimate means to correct him?" Teacher: "Yes, but it's no use. Fact is, it's a case of heredity. His father is an eminent lawyer and politician, and his mother was formerly a saleswoman at a bargain counter."

"AND now, let me see; what have we for breakfast this morning?" asked Mr. Fulton, as he glanced over the empty table at the Brighton boarding-house. "Well, there's ham, sir." "Ah, yes, ham or—what?" he inquired, with his most engaging manner. "Ham or nothing;" returned Mary, briefly.

"SAY," said the regular customer of the restaurant, as he stopped at the desk to pay his check, "where did you get that beef you are serving to-day?" "What's the matter with it?" aggressively asked the cashier, who scented another kick. "There's nothing the matter with it; that's why I asked."

VISITOR: "I am most grieved to learn of your mistress's illness. Nothing serious; no great cause for alarm, I trust!" The New French Maid: "No, monsieur; nozing beeg, nozing grande. Somezing—what you call leetle, petite." Visitor: "What is it?" The New French Maid: "Eet is what zey call ze little—small—small-pox."

"YOUNG man, do you ever gamble?" said a solemn-looking old party in the train. "Old boy, if you want to try the three-card trick on me, you might just as well shut up at once," replied the unregenerate youth; and the good old gentleman was so shocked that he forgot to offer the young man a single word more of advice.

"HERE, William," said a merchant, briskly, as he entered his office, "take this bunch of flowers in to Miss Typist, and here's a baseball ticket for the game this afternoon for yourself, and tell Mr. Pennib that he can have the vacation we were talking about whenever he wants it, and—" William (breaking in)—Is it a boy or a girl, sir?

WIFE (addressing her husband, who is very busy writing at his desk): "What are you writing there, my love?" "I am working away at my memoirs." "Ah! but you have not forgotten to mention your little wife, have you?" "Oh, dear no! I have represented you as the sun of my life, and am just now giving a description of those days on which you have made it particularly hot for me."

THE scene was a third-class smoking compartment, five on a side. The speaker was stout, florid, with short-cut grey hair and very self-satisfied. The effeminate degeneracy of modern young men was his theme. "Look at me! Sixty years of age—never had a day's illness in my life, and can do my five miles an hour! Why? Because from when I was twenty to when I was over forty I lived a regular life. No delicacies for me! No late hours! Every day, summer and winter, I went to bed at nine, got up at five, lived principally on porridge, worked hard—hard, mind you—from eight to one, then dinner, then an hour's walking exercise, and then—" "Beg your pard'n, guv'nor," interrupted a young workman sitting opposite, "but wot was you in for?"



## SOCIETY.

IN China women who mourn for dead husbands wear old dilapidated garments, neglect to wash their faces or comb their hair, and look as unattractive as possible.

THE Duke and Duchess of Cumberland will reside at Grumden until the beginning of December, when they go to Vienna for the winter, and there was some talk of their receiving a visit from the Empress of Russia and the Princess of Wales.

THE Emperor William is reported to have expressed a wish that his mother will reside at Berlin for some weeks during the winter, and it is possible that the Empress Frederick will arrange that the accompaniment of Princess Adolphus of Schaumburg-Lippe will take place there at her own palace.

So far as the rumour concerning a marriage between the Czarewitch and Princess Maud of Wales in question is concerned, it is only necessary to mention that the marriage of first cousins is not sanctioned by the Greek Catholic Church, and that Princess Maud is known to have repeatedly expressed her distaste for a foreign marriage.

THE Prince of Wales has arranged Tuesday, November 28th, as the date on which he will consecrate the Chancery Bar Lodge. The Pro Grand Master, the Earl of Lathom, will, it is expected, assist the Prince, and the ceremony will be a most impressive one at which many other Grand Officers will assist.

THE Empress of Austria is said to spend nearly half the day in having her hair cared for. During this time she is read to and smokes incessantly. She is credited with disposing of fifty cigarettes a day, and after dinner she caps the climax with two or three of the biggest and strongest cigars.

BEDROOM phonographs are to be the "things" of the future. Another improvement is to be made in portable phonographs, so that letters and articles can be delivered into the receiver to be reproduced by an amanuensis when required.

CHRISTIAN I. of Denmark was six feet eleven inches, nearly seven feet in height. The Czar Alexander III. is seventy-one Danish inches, or a little over six feet, which is certainly a good height. He is an inch and a half taller than his father-in-law, Christian IX. of Denmark, and four inches taller than King George of Greece.

THE Duchess of York looks far stronger than at the time of her marriage, when indeed she was tired by much excitement and almost unending exertion. She looks bright and happy, and will, without doubt, hold in her new position the immense popularity accorded to her during the past three years.

THE Queen has decided to alter the device of the Civil Division of the Order of the Bath. Instead of having only a plain gold medal, without any enamel, it is proposed to make it nearly the same as the Military device—a Maltese cross in white enamel, but without the wreath which is included in the device of that division. This change will be a great improvement, and has been suggested by the Prince of Wales.

COBURG is looking forward with deep interest to the merry month of December, as the new Duchess then purposes to start her Court and lead off social functions which ought to delight the whole country side. Ceremonial of the most impressive kind is confidently expected, with chamberlains backing before illustrious ladies in trains, and courtiers bowing all over the place.

LAST season it was the chrysoprase that held sway. The Prince of Wales was attracted by the pretty green stone when he saw it set round with diamonds, and his gift of a chrysoprase bangle to a fashionable bride led to a perfect outbreak of green bracelets, brooches and rings. This season, it seems, it is the pale yellow cornelian which is to be favoured. It has a brighter and more cheerful appearance than its predecessor, and it looks well on winter garments.

## STATISTICS.

ONE-SEVENTH of the landowners in Great Britain are women.

THERE are 230,000 singers in Church of England choirs.

DURING the present century eight thousand tons of gold have been mined the world over.

ACCORDING to the latest available returns Russia has the largest prison population, 108,840; next comes India with 75,510, Italy with 68,828, Japan with 63,828, France with 60,836, the United States with 59,258, and Great Britain with 34,740.

WEATHER forecasts in Great Britain grow more accurate every year, and the Meteorological Council announces with pride that 84 per cent. of those given last year were successful. Three years ago nearly 17 per cent. of the storm warnings were not fulfilled, but now the rate has fallen to 7 per cent.

## GEMS.

REMEMBER that what your children hear at home takes wings and flies abroad.

ABOUT all the buried treasures most people have, are the good resolutions they have put away.

THERE is less misery in being cheated than in that kind of wisdom which perceives, or thinks it perceives that all mankind are cheats.

THE chief thing to be done for those who are in trouble is to enable them to stand upon their own feet, to be brave and strong, to see the sun shining through the clouds, and thus to receive the education which such experiences are able to give. True friendship in calamity will spare no pains and leave no means untried to further these results.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TEA BISCUIT.—Scald one pint of milk. While hot, add one teaspoonful of butter. When lukewarm, stir in one half of a cup of yeast, one beaten egg, and one quart of flour. Beat and work until smooth. Set in a warm place until light. When risen work softly and roll out gently. Cut into small biscuits, let rise again for thirty minutes, or until light, and bake in a quick oven.

CHILI SAUCE.—Eighteen tomatoes, two large onions, three green peppers, one coffee cup of sugar, two and one-half cups of vinegar, four teaspoonfuls of salt, and one teaspoonful each of cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, mustard, ginger, and allspice. Peel, slice, and drain the tomatoes, chop the peppers and onions fine, and boil all together until tender; then add the spices, vinegar, and sugar, and boil half an hour longer.

ROLY POLY.—Half a pound of flour, quarter of a pound of chopped suet, half a teaspoonful of baking powder, pinch of salt, some jam; put the flour, suet, powder, and salt in a basin, make into a paste with cold water, roll out into a long square; wet the edges all round, spread with jam to near the edge, and roll up twice the ends, and rub the whole over with plenty of flour: dip a soft cloth in boiling water, roll it up lightly, tie the ends, and boil an hour and a half; take carefully out of the cloth.

BACON TO PICKLE.—Take a side of bacon you want pickled and rub in with salt. Put two pieces one above another, and let it lie a few days. It is better to be on a sloping board, so that the salt brine will run away. Every four or five days put fresh salt on it as the other runs away. Continue to do this for five or six weeks, then it will be ready for use. The melted salt does not give it such a good taste, and though this takes a lot more salt it is better. If the bacon is thick it takes longer to salt, and if the weather is dry it takes longer.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

INDIANS make blankets from bark.

WOMEN may now be seen driving cabs in New York.

WHITE is the colour of grief in China, Japan, and Siam.

IN Cuba etiquette requires that a request from one smoker to another for a light must always be honoured.

COOKS of all nations are to have a fair and feast in Paris next year, with prizes for "authors of new dishes."

THE difference between the tallest and shortest races in the world is 1 foot 4½ inches, and the average height is 5 feet 5½ inches.

IN every mile of railway there are 7 feet and 4 inches that are not covered by the rails—the space left between them for expansion.

SOME idea of the slaughter of elephants can be secured from the fact that in Zanzibar alone some £500,000 of ivory are marketed every season from the tusks of 10,000 elephants.

A FULL CUT diamond is called a brilliant and has fifty eight facets. A single-cut diamond has eighteen facets. A rose-cut diamond is one that is too small for the other cuts, is faceted only on the top, and is flat on the bottom.

THE Khedive's mother, who is only thirty-four, is still one of the most beautiful princesses in the East. She has a lovely clear complexion and magnificent eyes; but it is in the shape of the face and the carriage of her head that her beauty principally lies.

WHEN screws were made by hand five minutes were consumed in making one, and they were so expensive that wooden pins were used wherever practical. Now, by the cold-forged process, a single machine will turn out five dozen in a minute.

ACCORDING to Sir Crichton Browne, amongst the Gora nation, a people dwelling on a range of hills between the Brahmapootra and the Soorma valleys, the women are supreme. They woo the men, they control the affairs of the home and nation, property descends through them, and in everything they are dominant.

WOMEN who want to marry should turn their eyes towards Johannesburg, in South Africa. There are at least ten men to one woman there. Every moderately attractive woman marries within a few months after landing. It is impossible to keep servants or feminine employees of any sort.

"MEN of marked ability in any line have usually one deep, perpendicular wrinkle in the middle of the forehead, with one or two parallel to it on each side." So say some of the folk who pose as being learned in physiognomy, but any man whose forehead isn't marked that way will sniff contemptuously at the idea.

THE term "Black Maria," given to the conveyance which takes prisoners to jail, is said to have its origin in the fact that in the old colonial days Maria Lee, a gigantic negress, kept a sailor's boarding house in Boston. At one time she took three drunken sailors to the lock-up herself, and the authorities came at length to rely on her aid in arresting sailors. Hence the synonym.

FEW people have an idea how thin a sheet of veneer may be cut with the aid of improved machinery. From a single tusk thirty inches long may be cut a sheet of ivory 150 inches long and twenty inches wide. Some of the sheets of rosewood and mahogany are only about a fiftieth of an inch in thickness.

IT was formerly compulsory that all persons should be buried in flannel gowns, and there was an Act of Parliament to that effect. The nearest relatives of the deceased person had to go before a magistrate and make oath that the body was buried according to the Act of Parliament—that is, in woollen. The object of this decree was the benefit of the wool trade, and our ancestors seem to have thought far more of the trade of the country than the cause of death of its inhabitants, for they possessed no registration.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

G. E.—The West Coast of Africa.

B. T.—The river Avon runs through Pershore.

PENKLOPE.—We have no idea what you can mean.

SUFFERING SUR.—Have your mouth seen to by a dentist.

DOUBTFUL ONE.—As you used the meat you must pay for it.

CLINTONIA.—If a receipt is given a stamp must be affixed.

GERARD.—A spider's eyes are not in its head, but in the upper part of the thorax.

POOR SLAVEY.—You cannot compel your employer to give you a reference of any kind.

TAM.—A license is not wanted for a gun used only for scaring birds.

FREDDIE.—We cannot say if your infirmity would disqualify you. We fear it would.

PERCY.—As a rule a man's hair turns grey five years sooner than a woman's.

ANXIOUS WINNIE.—There is no sufficient reason why you should write to him.

R. FOUNTAIN.—An executor can appoint another person to act with him.

RODERICK.—The month's notice can be given on or from rent day.

MARKHAM R.—There must be a witness to a marriage at a registrar's office.

ENERGY 'AWKINS.—Banns of marriage stand good for three months.

IGNORAMUS.—The family name of the Royal Family is Guelph.

SERASTEN.—The City of London and the City of Westminster are included in the London district.

BARTON T.—Pigs should be fattened on steamed potatoes, parsnips, sweet turnips, and kitchen wash.

CONSTANT READER.—We know of no places where compensation as well as instruction is bestowed.

INQUIRER.—No personal knowledge of any such appliance or treatment.

AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.—A subsequent marriage nullifies any existing will.

WOULD-BE EMIGRANT.—From Liverpool to New York is about 3,060 miles.

WRATHFUL LODGER.—You cannot be punished for removing your goods if you gave the landlord notice.

GUSTAVE.—Card-playing is not illegal on licensed premises unless stakes are played for.

M. B. C.—You may detain the lodger's box for rent, but you have no right to sell it or its contents.

TEDDIE.—The brother may be summoned in the Police Court for illegally detaining your wife's property.

MYRIE.—Your best plan is to advertise in the local papers of any place you suppose him to be in.

IN NEED OF ADVICE.—We think you had better be guided by the advice of those who are thoroughly acquainted with the circumstances.

IMPATIENCE.—Go to a shoemaker and have him put a peg in the middle of the sole, and there will be no more loud proclamations.

A. A.—You must do as the parish authorities bid you, or they can stop all relief. If you apply to a magistrate he may help you.

MOONLIGHT.—You must address the managers of the institution; it is not a matter of such concern to the public as to justify a newspaper correspondence.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—To appeal to the law for redress without adequate means to prosecute the case, would not be desirable, and might fail to benefit you.

Y. H. H.—You cannot claim damages; the landlord having a legal right to refuse to sell during prohibited hours.

TRIBUTATION.—A separation might be agreed upon between you, but even this would not be desirable unless you have the means to live apart from him.

UNHAPPY VIOLET.—You will have to use your own judgment in coming to a decision, as to what it would be proper for you to do under the circumstances stated.

FORTUNE.—Before beginning to seed raisins cover them with hot water, and let them stand fifteen minutes. The seeds can then be removed easily.

DOMESTICITY.—Bread and cake bowls, or any dishes in which flour or eggs have been used, are more easily cleaned if placed in cold water after using.

BROKEN-HEARTED.—From the particulars given, it appears that you have misunderstood the intentions, or lack of intentions, of the young man.

A MARTYR.—The teeth sometimes become dark from constitutional causes. It is always best to consult a first-class dentist or physician.

ONE WHO LIKES THE LONDON READER.—The eating of mince pie was considered a test of orthodoxy, as the Puritans considered it an abomination to eat them. They were originally made long, in imitation of the manger in which the Saviour was laid.

L. T. M.—The mite mentioned in the Gospel in connection with the widow's contribution to the treasury was a Greek copper coin weighing eighteen grains.

FORGET-ME-NOT.—The best way to use a tooth brush is to brush the teeth up and down, so that the bristles can remove the foreign particles that lodge between the teeth.

C. H. W.—A child cannot be adopted without the consent of its parents, if they are living. No one has the right to take the child and retain him against the wishes of the parent.

BLUSHER.—We can only suggest that you mingle freely in society, and endeavour to get rid of the self-consciousness which is the main cause of your embarrassment.

UNHAPPY MOTHER.—He can be compelled to return, unless there be some good reason, such as cruelty or drunkenness on the part of the parent, which would make it improper for him to live with his parent.

LOTTIE.—There are various causes of nose-bleeding. One is a tendency to congestion in the head, another is a delicacy of the membranes and liability to be ruptured by any accident.

ALICE DEMPEY.—They should be soaked in warm soda water. Then add to the water a few drops of ammonia, and wash the globes with a well-soaped flannel. Rinse in clean cold water, and dry with a linen glass-cloth.

## A BUNDLE OF OLD SERMONS.

The ink is brown, the paper soiled,  
How long ago the writer tolled  
Upon these pages!  
And as we read the Old World lore,  
Their quaint allusions, they restore  
The past to us; we live once more  
In bygone ages.

We hear, as if by magic charm,  
Once more the "Tate and Brady" psalm  
Which pleased so vastly;  
The church and rustic flock grow plain,  
The high oak pews, the latticed pane—  
We hear the sermon preached again  
From text to "lastly."

No novel views of ancient sense,  
No daring flights of eloquence  
Were here embodied;  
The placid hearers felt no thrill,  
But sat in sleepy comfort still,  
While Jack demurely glanced at Jill,  
And parents nodded.

Indeed, none listened much, I fear,  
To all these periods, painting clear  
The saint and sinner;  
Until at length there came the close  
To stir the drowsy from repose,  
And priest and people both arose  
And went to dinner.

Ah, sermons of the long ago,  
Yours was another age, we know;  
And now our preachers,  
Each furnished with his special plan  
To benefit bewildered man,  
Denounce as loudly as they can  
Their rival teachers.

Yet, as your pages we retrace  
In this our age of cultured grace,  
The question lingers  
If all of us are happier men  
Than those who filled our places when  
Your sage designer took the pen  
Between his fingers!

A. C. D.

G. E.—Drivers of vehicles are required by law to keep to the left hand side of the road when meeting other vehicles, and to allow drivers of other vehicles to "overtake" them on their right hand.

BETTY.—To prevent the cracking of fruit jars when filled, rinse the jars with clean, cold water, then dip a towel in cold water, double it, three or four times, lay it smoothly in a dripping pan, and set your cold jars on this to fill them.

PERPLEXED ONE.—The first century ended with the year 100, the second with 200, the third with 300, and the nineteenth century will end with the year 1900. The first year of the twentieth century will begin with January 1.

CONSTANT SUBSCRIBER.—The Duke of Edinburgh was, until recently, admiral in command at Devonport. The Duke of Connaught has been lieutenant-general in command at Portsmouth, and has lately been appointed to the command at Aldershot.

MISERABLE MEG.—We hardly know what advice to give you. Your complaints against your husband would not enable you to obtain a divorce from him, and though it seems cruel on his part to annoy you so constantly, we see no help for you except through appeals to his manliness.

T. B. A.—Plum-skins should never be eaten. By impaction in the intestines they set up fermentation, and are often the cause of the troubles and derangements attributed to the free use of this fruit. The skins of most plums are absolutely indigestible. They form a leathery envelope for the protection of the maturing fruit, and should always be rejected.

A. PERCIVAL.—A tenant cannot avoid payment of rent because his house is in a dangerous condition. He should give notice and leave in the usual way.

W. LE.—It is against our rule to give trade addresses in our columns. We think, however, you could obtain what you require through any fancy stationer in your district.

AN OLD READER.—The pigment with which the shell of the lobster is imbued is black, and secreted by the true skin, which also gives out calcareous matter after each moult, so that lime and pigment are blended together. The boiling water causes the pigment to change from black to red.

LITTLE HOUSEWIFE.—To clean paint, dissolve an ounce of powdered borax and a pound of the best brown soap, which has been cut in pieces, in three quarts of hot water. When the soap is all dissolved, the mixture is ready for use. A piece of soft white flannel may be used to rub the paint, which will not be injured in the slightest degree.

ROSE LEE.—(1) Judging from what you tell us of the young man we should say he is only flirting with you, and is consequently not worth a serious thought, and can only advise you not to encourage him to visit you. Absent yourself occasionally from home when he is sailing, and at other times do not appear that you are anxious to entertain him. (2) We cannot say. (3) Practice alone.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—The "foot" is named from the length of that member in a full-grown man. Some say that it was so called from the length of the foot of a certain English king, but it is believed to have been a standard of measurement among the ancient Egyptians. The cubit is from the Latin cubitus, an elbow, and is the distance from the elbow to the end of the middle finger. Fathom is from the Aryan, *fath*, to extend, and denotes the distance from tip to tip of the fingers, when the arms of an average-sized man are fully extended.

BEATRICE.—There is no remedy for pimples that can be proscribed as a general rule. The cause of them and the state of the system, as well as many other things are necessary to know before one could give any information that would be of value. As a rule, a careful diet, great care in bathing and general cleanliness will do much toward keeping the skin free from pimples. There may be a local or constitutional cause, and this must be understood and regulated by appropriate remedies. Freckles are usually caused by the sun. Bathe them with salt and lemon juice, and avoid exposure to the sun as much as possible.

OLD FASHIONED GIRL.—To make an old-fashioned rose pot-pourri, the roses collected should be fresh blown, of the sweetest-smelling kinds, and gathered in as dry a state as possible. After each gathering spread out the petals on a sheet of paper, and leave until free from all moisture, then place a layer of petals in the rose jar, sprinkling with coarse salt; then another layer and salt, alternating until the jar is full. Leave for a few days, or until a broth is formed; then incorporate thoroughly, and add more petals and salt, mixing daily for a week, when fragrant gums and spices should be added, such as benzoin, storax, cassia buds, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, and vanilla bean. Mix again and leave for a few days, when add essential oil of jasmine, violet, tuberose and otto of roses, together with a very little ambergris or musk, in mixture with the flower otto to fix the odour. Cinnamon and cloves should be sparingly used.

B. H.—An artesian well is one which is produced by a peculiar geological formation; nearly all rocks contain water, which they will yield upon ascertained conditions; clays, however, do not part with any share of their moisture; then some other rocks as retentive as the clays are filled with fissures through which water filters to a lower level; if then, you could imagine a lump of pie-crust to be the surface of the earth, the outer layer clay, and the layers below water-bearing or fissured rocks, then further suppose the paste to be bent down till a hollow is formed, all the water in the alternate layers, on finding its way between them from the surface, will very naturally press down below the bottom of the depression; now bore a hole in the outer paste or clay and up the water will come with a force corresponding to the depth it has descended through the bent down layer; one such well at Guenette, near Paris, is 1798 feet deep, and yields 57½ gallons a minute; all that the experienced engineer requires to locate an artesian well is to know the nature of the rocks in a district, and how they lie; some are in London.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by G. F. CORNFORD; and printed by WOOLFALL and KINDER, 70 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.